



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS

TUESDAY — 25 OCT 2022



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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	10/24 Texas natural gas drops toward zero
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/texas-natural-gas-drops-toward-zero-as-output-swamps-pipelines/
GIST	<p>Natural gas prices in the Permian Basin of West Texas are plunging toward zero as booming production overwhelms pipeline networks, creating a regional glut of the fuel.</p> <p>Gas in an area of the vast Permian known as Waha was trading for as little as 20 cents to 70 cents per million British thermal units on Monday, traders said. That compares with the U.S. benchmark futures contract that's trading around \$5 and European prices close to \$28.</p>

	<p>If West Texas prices tumble into negative territory, energy producers will effectively be paying someone to take gas off their hands – something that hasn’t happened in two years.</p> <p>The price collapse illustrates the sharp contrast between bountiful U.S. supplies of the fuel and Europe’s worsening energy crisis as winter approaches. Tight gas markets in Europe and Asia threaten to have knock-on effects for diesel, coal and power as governments and utilities scramble for energy, according to Bloomberg Intelligence.</p> <p>The Texas price plunge stems from maintenance scheduled for Kinder Morgan’s Gulf Coast Express and El Paso Natural Gas pipeline systems.</p> <p>Insufficient pipeline capacity has been a long-term problem that has dogged Permian Basin gas producers for years. The choke points worsen when pipeline operators must perform repairs and preventive maintenance work that forces temporary reduction in pressure or halts to shipping.</p> <p>Permian pipeline constraints “have never been relieved,” making the region more susceptible to sudden gluts and price volatility, said Campbell Faulkner, chief data analyst at OTC Global Holdings.</p> <p>Waha gas went negative eight times in 2020 and more than two dozen times in 2019, data compiled by Bloomberg shows.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 Study: common Covid symptoms change
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/the-most-common-covid-symptoms-have-changed-study-says-heres-what-they-are/
GIST	<p>The most commonly reported COVID-19 symptoms in recent weeks have changed since the coronavirus started to spread across the globe, a study has found.</p> <p>The top symptoms were mostly similar regardless of vaccination status, according to the Zoe Health Study, a long-running research project based in the U.K. that tracks the virus through its COVID Symptoms Tracker app. Through the app, participants self report their COVID-19 experience.</p> <p>The study’s latest list published Oct. 20 highlights how “symptoms as recorded previously are changing with the evolving variants of the virus,” according to the report.</p> <p>Four out of five top COVID-19 symptoms were the same for participants who received two vaccine doses, one vaccine dose and those unvaccinated, according to the research. These symptoms were headache, persistent cough, sore throat, and a runny nose.</p> <p>However, the top symptoms differed in how they ranked for each vaccination status group, the study found. Additionally, each group reported one different COVID-19 symptom that made the top five.</p> <p>For those who received two COVID-19 shots, a stuffy nose was included in this group’s five most-common symptoms while it was absent from the other groups’ top five.</p> <p>Here is how the top five symptoms ranked for the group, according to the study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1. Sore throat • 2. Runny nose • 3. Stuffy nose • 4. Persistent cough • 5. Headache <p>Previously, loss of smell, shortness of breath and a fever were considered more common COVID-19 symptoms for those vaccinated with two doses, according to the research.</p>

Meanwhile, for participants who got one vaccine dose, sneezing was included in the group's top five symptoms but not in the other two groups.

Here is how the study found this group's top five ranked:

- 1. Headache
- 2. Runny nose
- 3. Sore throat
- 4. Sneezing
- 5. Persistent cough

For those unvaccinated, participants reported having a fever more often than the other groups, according to the research. As a result, fever made the top five most-common symptoms for people who haven't gotten a COVID-19 shot.

Here's the top five most-common symptoms for those unvaccinated, according to the research:

- 1. Headache
- 2. Sore throat
- 3. Runny nose
- 4. Fever
- 5. Persistent cough

The study was based on daily self-reports and did not factor in COVID-19 variants or participants' demographics, according to Zoe Health.

Ultimately, there are many COVID-19 symptoms, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Others include fatigue, nausea, body aches and more.

Several people who were infected with COVID-19 may be dealing with long COVID, when virus symptoms last longer than the initial infection, McClatchy News reported. CDC research published in May found that about 1 in 5 adults may develop at least one long COVID symptom following an infection.

The Zoe Health Study's latest top symptoms list comes as the omicron variant — and several of its subvariants — dominated virus cases for the week ending Oct. 22, according to CDC data estimates.

The subvariants could cause a fall and winter surge in COVID-19 cases, Justin Lessler, an infectious disease epidemiologist based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, told Nature.

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HEADLINE	10/24 New sanctions at Nicaragua Ortega regime
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/10/24/Biden-imposes-Nicaragua-sanctions-visa-restrictions/7781666662437/
GIST	<p>Oct. 24 (UPI) -- The United States on Monday unleashed a slew of new punitive measures targeting Nicaragua's regime of President Daniel Ortega following his election to a fifth term in office last year.</p> <p>The actions include sanctions and visa restrictions after President Joe Biden signed an executive order Monday that expands authority at the disposal of federal departments to hold the Nicaraguan regime to account for "its escalating human rights violations, continued dismantling of democratic institutions, attacks on civil society and increasing security cooperation with Russia," the White House said in a statement.</p> <p>The White House under Biden has been tightening its diplomatic and financial ties on Ortega and first lady Rosario Murillo, who is also Nicaragua's vice president, following his election to a fifth term in office</p>

in November 2021 in a contest that has been widely discredited as a sham as it followed the arrests of dozens of opposition politicians and the blocking of participation of political groups.

Protests that followed were also met by a bloody government crack down.

Under the new measures, the Treasury blacklisted Nicaragua's entire gold sector and a close confidant of Ortega while the State Department imposed visa restrictions on 500 Nicaraguan officials, including police, judges, prosecutors and others, as well as their family members for enabling the regime's oppression.

"Governments that deny their people's basic rights or threaten the security interests of their neighbors should not expect that their political, economic and trade relationships with the United States will remain unaffected," State Department spokesman Ned Price said to reporters Monday in Washington, D.C.

"The United States, together with our allies and partners, believes that a return to democracy and respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Nicaragua is essential, and we will use the diplomatic and economic tools available to promote accountability for the Ortega-Murillo regime."

The Treasury identified Nicaragua's General Directorate of Mines for sanctions, stating that since the Biden administration blacklisted mining state mining company Eniminas in June it has managed most mining conducted in the country and is an important piece in its gold operations.

Officials said proceeds from Nicaragua's gold industry go to the pockets of Ortega and those in his inner circle.

Reinaldo Gregorio Lenin Cerna Juarez, Ortega's former head of state security, was also sanctioned Monday on accusations of being involved in numerous acts of violence, murder and torture.

"The Ortega-Murillo regime's continued attacks on democratic actors and members of civil society and unjust detention of political prisoners demonstrate that the regime feels it is not bound by the rule of law," Brian Nelson, under secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, said in a statement. "With President Biden's new Executive Order, we can and will use every tool at our disposal to deny the Ortega-Murillo regime the resources they need to continue to undermine democratic institutions in Nicaragua."

The State Department imposed visa restrictions on those who, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said, "formulate, implement or benefit from policies or actions that undermine democratic institutions or impede the return to democracy in Nicaragua."

"No member of the Nicaraguan government nor anyone who facilitates the Ortega-Murillo Regime's abuses should believe they can travel freely to the United States," he said in a statement.

By amending a previous executive order concerning the situation in Nicaragua on Monday, Biden specifically targeted individuals and entities operating in sectors of the economy that the regime uses to fund its authoritarian and destabilizing activities.

It also allows for restrictions on certain trade and investment in the country to stifle the flow of funds to the regime.

The measures come after the Biden administration sanctioned Eniminas in June and reallocated Nicaragua's sugar quota in July.

The United States along with Britain and Canada also sanctioned Nicaraguan officials following Ortega's election.

	<p>In response to the condemnation of the election, Ortega's regime has bucked international organizations, including in late April when it closed the offices of the Organization of American States and expelled its staff from within its borders.</p> <p>The OAS had passed resolutions declaring Nicaragua's elections had "no democratic legitimacy," and the regime pulled out of the organization while accusing it of being an instrument of U.S. meddling.</p> <p>Earlier this month, Nicaragua was one of five countries that voted against a U.N. General Assembly resolution rejecting Russia's attempt to annex four Ukrainian regions.</p> <p>The White House said Monday that as the Biden administration and its allies have sought to hold Moscow accountable for its war of aggression, Ortega has increased its relations with the Kremlin, allowing Russian military personnel and equipment in the Central American nation.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Myanmar junta airstrike on concert kills 80
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/10/25/myanmar-airstrike-concert-Kachin-Independence-Army-junta-military/3871666678164/
GIST	<p>Oct. 25 (UPI) -- An airstrike by Myanmar's ruling military has killed up to 80 people at a music festival in the country's mountainous northern state of Kachin, local media and international organizations said, drawing widespread condemnation.</p> <p>Three fighter jets bombed the festival on Sunday, independent news outlet Myanmar Now reported, killing at least four well-known Kachin performers, as well as civilians and officers of the Kachin Independence Army, an ethnic rebel group that controls the area and has clashed with the Myanmar military for decades.</p> <p>The festival was held to celebrate the 62nd anniversary of the group's political wing, the Kachin Independence Organization.</p> <p>Some 80 people were killed and 100 injured by the aerial attack in Hpakant Township, according to Kachin News Group, which also reported that government security forces were blocking wounded people from leaving the area to receive medical treatment.</p> <p>The casualty figures have not been independently verified, but the bombing would appear to be the deadliest airstrike since the military overthrew a democratically elected civilian government and seized power in a February 2021 coup.</p> <p>The United Nations on Monday said it was "deeply concerned and saddened" by the attack.</p> <p>"What would appear to be excessive and disproportionate use of force by security forces against unarmed civilians is unacceptable and those responsible must be held to account," it said in a statement.</p> <p>Myanmar's National Unity Government, a government-in-exile composed of ousted lawmakers and politicians, called the attack a violation of International laws, and said the military has conducted 240 airstrikes targeting civilian populations since the coup, resulting in more than 200 deaths.</p> <p>"The act of the terrorist military clearly violates international laws as the provisions of the Geneva Conventions, which stipulate that civilians must be protected from attack at all times," the NUG said in a statement.</p> <p>A military airstrike last month on a village, including a school, in the Sagaing region of northwestern Myanmar left at least 11 children dead.</p>

Rights group Amnesty International said the bombing on Sunday was the latest in a series of unlawful air attacks by the military, and called on leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, who are meeting this week to discuss Myanmar, to step up efforts to resolve the crisis.

"We fear this attack is part of a pattern of unlawful aerial attacks by the military, which have killed and injured civilians in areas controlled by armed groups," Amnesty International deputy regional director Hana Young said.

"This attack highlights the need to overhaul the approach to the crisis in Myanmar," she said in [a statement](#). "ASEAN has to step up and formulate a more robust course of action so that military leaders end this escalating repression."

Ambassadors and diplomats from Australia, Canada, Britain, the United States, the European Union and EU member states with a presence in Myanmar issued a [joint statement](#) Monday condemning the attack.

"Indiscriminate attacks which include civilian victims continue to cause extraordinary harm and suffering across the country," the statement said. "This attack underscores the military regime's responsibility for crisis and instability in Myanmar and the region and its disregard for its obligation to protect civilians and respect the principles and rules of international humanitarian law."

Myanmar's military government acknowledged the airstrike but called the reports of the massacre of civilians "fake news" and claimed it was battling armed rebels under international rules of engagement.

"As security forces, they are required to fight insurgents, which is necessary for regional stability and peace," the Myanmar's Ministry of Information [said](#) in a news release.

In February 2021, Myanmar's military overthrew the elected civilian government led by [Aung San Suu Kyi](#) on widely debunked charges of voter fraud, detaining the former democracy activist and other high-ranking officials.

Civil disobedience and nationwide protests sprung up immediately after the coup, which the junta have brutally suppressed and have hardened into an internal conflict that some describe as a full-fledged civil war.

Human rights investigators at the United Nations [released a report](#) in August outlining the junta's "systematic crimes against humanity."

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HEADLINE	10/25 Covid stifles China economy
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-q4-gdp-hits-early-speed-bump-covid-stifles-economy-2022-10-25/
GIST	<p>BEIJING, Oct 25 (Reuters) - China's economic growth is hitting an early speed bump in the fourth quarter as COVID-19 curbs and anxieties further tapped the brakes on travel and shipping, constraining consumption and commerce in the world's second-largest economy.</p> <p>Mobility statistics - from metro passenger traffic in cities and flight cancellations to domestic container handling at major ports - have worsened in October despite falling local coronavirus cases, suggesting COVID-19 preventive measures, or fear of those measures, are still stifling economic activity.</p> <p>China reported on Monday a faster-than-expected 3.9% expansion in its economy in the third quarter, but data for September showed weak imports of goods and retail sales, reflecting its still subdued domestic demand.</p> <p>Even in its feeble state, household consumption of goods and services accounted for more than half of gross domestic product growth in the third quarter, underlining its outsized weighting in the economy.</p>

Mike, an international school teacher in Xian, said he had decided to stay put in the city.

"It is simply not worth the financial risk as well the mental strain of having to deal with getting locked down in another city, endless cancellations of flights, etc.," he told Reuters, requesting he be identified by his first name only.

A gauge of how mobile people are in China slumped 29.5% on Oct. 23 from a year earlier, versus a decline of 27.5% a week earlier, Nomura wrote in a research note, citing GPS data tracked by Chinese search engine giant Baidu.

The ratio of cancelled flights to scheduled flights remained elevated, rising to 68.33% over the week of Oct. 18-24 from 67.14% the week before, according to Reuters calculations based on data from air traffic consultancy Variflight.

Container throughput at eight major ports fell 7.3% during Oct. 1-10 from a year earlier, compared with a 4.4% increase in the last 10 days of September, partly due to worsening domestic trade, data from China Ports and Harbours Association showed.

An index measuring road freight transport turnover tumbled 26.2% on Oct. 21 from a year prior versus a 23.7% drop a week earlier, according to Nomura.

As China wages war on Omicron this year, authorities have stepped up PCR tests on local populations and ramped up requirements on visitors, dampening the desire to travel. Inspections of goods from overseas and other provinces have also delayed deliveries for days and even weeks.

China has repeatedly underlined its zero-COVID-19 policies even as cases ebb. New local infections fell 24% to 6,096 during Oct. 18-24 from a week earlier.

'STAY AT HOME'

Despite the drop, the cities of Guangzhou, Zhengzhou and Xian have reported a resurgence, risking the implementation of more curbs on their combined population of more than 44 million.

The cities - major domestic logistics hubs and producers of everything from autos and auto parts to machinery and electronics - reported a total of 804 new local cases for Oct. 18-24, up from 431 in the previous seven-day period.

In Zhengzhou, residents of some districts have been told to "stay at home", while dine-in is prohibited at restaurants. Schools, childcare institutions and off-campus training institutions function online only.

Zhengzhou's metro traffic slumped 79% from Oct. 11 to Oct. 15, according to the latest available data.

In Guangzhou, colleges have been closed since Monday in one district, while primary and secondary schools and kindergartens have gone online and restaurants have been shuttered since last week. In another district, cinemas, theatres, bars, gyms and internet cafes were closed until Wednesday.

Metro traffic in Guangzhou dropped 8.8% during Oct. 18-24 from the previous week, Reuters calculations based on data released by local metro operators showed.

"With the 'dynamic clearing' COVID strategy likely to stay in place for the foreseeable future, consumption is unlikely to rebound," said Chinese research group Gavekal Dragonomics.

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HEADLINE	10/24 Russia 'illusion' Kherson evacuation?
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/russia-ukraine-kherson/2022/10/24/id/1093181/

GIST	<p>Russia is reportedly creating an "illusion" of retreat by evacuating civilians from Kherson, a key Ukrainian regional capital now under Moscow's control.</p> <p>Kyrylo Budanov, chief of Ukraine's military intelligence arm, told the online news outlet Ukrainska Pravda that as Ukrainian forces advance on Kherson, Russia is moving out cash, Russian-installed authorities, and injured people — and moving in military resources.</p> <p>"They are conducting this crazy information campaign that 'we care about people' and so on," Budanov told the outlet, The Hill reported.</p> <p>"That is, they create the illusion that everything is gone. And at the same time, on the contrary, they bring new military units there and prepare the streets of the city for defense."</p> <p>Russia has controlled Kherson — a key port city along the Dnieper River — for months, The Hill reported, noting it's one of four Ukrainian regions Moscow illegally annexed in early October.</p> <p>At the same time, however, Ukrainian forces have continued to make gains in the south, setting up a battle over the city that once had a population of about 280,000 residents.</p> <p>Kherson is the only regional capital Moscow captured in its invasion, The Hill added.</p> <p>Budanov told the Ukrainian news outlet he thinks Kyiv will retake Kherson by the end of the year — a victory that would be a major blow to Russian President Vladimir Putin, The Hill reported.</p> <p>Last week, Gen. Sergey Surovikin, the newly installed commander of Russian forces in Ukraine, said "difficult decisions" may have to be made in Kherson, adding that Russian officials would "preserve the lives of the civilian population and our military personnel as much as possible."</p> <p>"He prepares the groundwork so that, if a decision is made to surrender the city, or they will simply be kicked out, the groundwork will be prepared and somehow smooth it all out," Budanov told Ukrainska Pravda of Surovikin's remark, The Hill reported.</p> <p>"But at the same time, I cannot tell you that right now they are fleeing from Kherson," Budanov continued. "No, there is no such thing."</p> <p>Branislav Slantchev, a professor of political science at the University of California, San Diego, has said they have seen the Russians simultaneously evacuating military assets and moving troops in, The Hill reported.</p> <p>"The troops positioned there are supposed to be among the better ones that they have," Slantchev said, The Hill reported. "And so what they seem to be doing, they're moving out, saving these troops and equipment. And they're just rushing [national guard] troops, these recently mobilized people and things like this to the frontlines to hold the front while the evacuation can be completed."</p> <p>Ukraine has accused Russia of preparing to blow up a dam that could flood the city, citing evidence of mines at the facility. Budanov told Ukrainska Pravda the mines have existed since April, The Hill reported.</p> <p>"It is partially mined, that's true," he said. "Well, it is very difficult to evaluate the stupidity of Russians with some logic."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 Congo fighting flares: M23 rebels, army
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/m23-rebels-clash-with-army-renewed-east-congo-fighting-2022-10-24/

GIST	<p>GOMA, Oct 24 (Reuters) - Fighters from the M23 rebel group clashed with the army in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo on Monday in a fourth day of violence in which four civilians have been killed, the army said.</p> <p>About 500 people, some of them injured, sought shelter in a convent in Ntamugenga village near the borders of Uganda and Rwanda and need to be evacuated, the medical charity Medecins Sans Frontieres tweeted.</p> <p>The unrest in North Kivu province has broken months of relative calm in eastern Congo following clashes between the army and M23 militants at the end of March.</p> <p>The group declared a ceasefire in April, and the seven countries of the East African Community trade bloc set up a regional military force to try to stem decades of militant activity in Congo's mineral-rich east.</p> <p>But M23 rebels attacked military posts in Rutshuru territory near the border with Uganda and Rwanda on Thursday, national army spokesman Sylvain Ekenge said in a statement late on Sunday.</p> <p>Four civilians were killed and 40 injured, including children, he added.</p> <p>M23 spokesman Willy Ngoma and the group's president Bertrand Bisimwa both posted Twitter posts accusing the army of initiating the violence.</p> <p>HIGHWAY</p> <p>A civil society source did not wish to be named said the M23 had captured Ntamugenga, a strategic target close to a highway connecting the city of Butembo to provincial capital Goma.</p> <p>"Fighting continues around Ntamugenga this morning," Ekenge told Reuters on Monday.</p> <p>One Congolese official said the army had retreated from the village to protect civilians and was shooting at M23 rebels in surrounding bush land.</p> <p>The M23 is waging its most sustained offensive this year since a 2012-2013 insurrection that seized vast swathes of territory before fighters were chased out by Congolese and United Nations forces into Uganda and Rwanda.</p> <p>There have been regional efforts in recent years to have the M23 demobilize, but its leaders have complained about the slow implementation of a peace accord and accused the Congolese army of waging war against it.</p> <p>Congo accuses Rwanda and Uganda of backing the group, which they deny.</p> <p>More than 23,000 people have fled the latest bout of fighting since Oct. 20, including 2,500 that crossed the border to Uganda, according to the United Nations.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 Deadly fungi infecting more in US
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/deadly-fungi-are-infecting-more-americans-11666568576?mod=hp_listc_pos4
GIST	<p>It wasn't the cancer or rounds of chemotherapy and radiation that almost killed David Erwin. It was a fungus most people inhale every day.</p> <p>Fungal infections kill more than 1.6 million people yearly, according to Global Action for Fungal Infections, a research and fundraising organization. The toll is climbing. Fungi are adapting to rising temperatures in ways that may make them better suited to thrive in the human body, researchers said. And more people undergoing treatments that weaken their immune systems means a larger population vulnerable to severe fungal infections.</p>

At least 7,000 people died in the U.S. from fungal infections in 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said. In 1969, the CDC reported 450 such deaths. Current cases are likely undercounted because of misdiagnoses, the agency said.

“Public awareness of fungal infections is abysmal,” said Peter Pappas, an infectious-disease specialist at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. “They think of toenail fungus or jock itch. They don’t understand that with some of these invasive fungal infections, if left untreated or even when they are treated, they can often lead to death.”

Mr. Erwin, a 60-year-old former manager at a trucking company, hadn’t heard of the fungus *Aspergillus* until the spring of 2021, when a neurosurgeon dug out a colony of it from his brain.

Mr. Erwin, who lives in Joliet, Ill., had completed chemotherapy for throat cancer in 2020. He said he continued to experience symptoms that flummoxed physicians. He lost the use of his right arm and leg and developed back pain so debilitating that for months he said he could barely move without screaming. The mass the surgeon removed helped confirm that *Aspergillus* had colonized his brain, lungs and spine. The common mold can grow on carpets, pillows and in air conditioners.

“*Aspergillus* is everywhere,” Mr. Erwin said. “It could be in your backyard.”

More than 75,000 people are hospitalized in the U.S. every year with fungal infections, one-fifth of which are caused by *Aspergillus*, the CDC said. Fatality rates associated with some fungal infections including severe cases involving *Aspergillus* can exceed 50%, research shows.

Fungi, which were among the first complex life-forms on land, became a global public-health threat about 35 years ago [amid the HIV/AIDS epidemic](#) as immunocompromised populations began to increase globally, said Michail Lionakis, head of fungal pathogenesis research at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

Immunocompromised people, including those taking medications that suppress the immune system, are at particular risk of severe fungal infections, infectious-disease experts said. At least seven million people in the U.S. are immunocompromised, according to the CDC, and Dr. Lionakis said the population is growing as more people receive treatments like chemotherapy and organ transplantation.

The CDC last month urged patients and healthcare providers to consider fungi a potential culprit if an infection isn’t responding to treatments. The World Health Organization said it plans this year to release a list of priority fungal diseases that it hopes will spur funding for research and drug development.

The Food and Drug Administration has approved four classes of antifungal medications for invasive infections. A new class to treat severe diseases hasn’t been approved in over two decades. Most antifungals for serious infections are toxic, some even at low doses. There are no approved vaccines targeting fungi.

Several antifungal drugs are in development and researchers are probing potential vaccines. In a Phase 2 trial, Amplyx Pharmaceuticals Inc.’s antifungal fosmanogepix was found to be effective against *Aspergillus*, a yeast known as *Candida* and other rare molds and was well-tolerated by patients. [Pfizer Inc.](#) acquired Amplyx last year.

[Cidara Therapeutics](#) Inc. said it has submitted its drug rezafungin, which was shown in trials to eradicate *Aspergillus* and *Candida*, for FDA approval. [Matinas BioPharma Holdings](#) Inc. said it is developing a nontoxic and oral version of amphotericin B, one of the oldest and most potent—but also most toxic—antifungals. F2G Ltd. said Friday that the Phase 2 clinical trial for its antifungal olorofim, developed to treat patients with severe infections caused by *Aspergillus* and other rare molds, had found the drug to be effective in almost half of patients for whom current therapies didn’t work and was mostly well-tolerated.

Unlike bacteria and viruses, fungi, like humans, have eukaryotic cells with complex structures and a clearly defined nuclei—a biological similarity that makes developing nontoxic antifungals and vaccines challenging, researchers said. “It’s hard to make antifungals that are not anti-human,” said Andrej Spec, an associate professor of medicine at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis.

[Rising temperatures](#) may be propelling the spread of some dangerous fungi by encouraging them to adapt in ways that help them better infect humans, said Dr. Spec, who runs a clinic focused on invasive fungal infections. His research shows that potentially deadly fungi including *Blastomyces* and *Histoplasma* have significantly expanded their range in the U.S. since the 1950s to include most U.S. states.

Pathogens need to withstand the human body’s average temperature of 37 degrees Celsius, which is too hot for most fungi to thrive, said Felipe Santiago-Tirado, a fungal-infection expert at the University of Notre Dame. But some fungi, including the deadly species *Candida auris*, appear to have adapted to warmer temperatures, making them better suited to surviving inside humans, he said. The first known *Candida auris* infection was reported in Japan in 2009. [Candida auris infections](#) have since been reported in about half of all U.S. states.

“Body temperature used to be a big barrier,” said Dr. Santiago-Tirado. “But now *Candida auris* is a big problem.

The overuse of antibiotics is also contributing to the burgeoning threat of fungal infections, infectious-disease experts said. When antibiotics kill bacteria in the body, including types that support the immune system, aid digestion and fight pathogens, they create a void that fungi can exploit.

Amy Sylvis, a 41-year-old real-estate investor with cystic fibrosis in Los Angeles, said she was prescribed antibiotics about twice a year for almost a decade for lung infections that were misdiagnosed as primarily bacterial. She would feel a bit better and would be sent home but the infection would return.

“Ironically, the antibiotics probably made the issue worse as it allowed the fungi to grow and become more prevalent,” she said.

It wasn’t until Ms. Sylvis read about *Aspergillus* on online forums for people with cystic fibrosis, a genetic disorder that damages the lungs and digestive system, that she said she pressured her doctors to test her for it. She said she was relieved to finally pinpoint a source of her suffering.

“I’d missed out on a lot of life,” she said.

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HEADLINE	10/25 Russia methodically attacks Ukraine grid
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/25/russias-methodical-attacks-exploit-frailty-ukrainian-power-system/
GIST	<p>Russia’s ongoing attacks on Ukraine’s energy infrastructure have been so methodical and destructive that Ukrainian and Western officials say they are being directed by electricity specialists who know exactly which targets will inflict maximum pain on Ukraine’s grid.</p> <p>The two-week-old bombing campaign, an effort to plunge Ukrainians into darkness ahead of their country’s bitter winter, has focused less on well-protected power generation plants and more on the network nodes that are key to keeping Ukraine’s electricity grid functioning and providing critical services.</p> <p>Already, more than a third of Ukraine’s hard-to-replace transmission hubs have been damaged or destroyed, officials said.</p> <p>Russia’s shift in tactics is alarming Ukrainian and Western officials as temperatures start to drop in Ukraine. They warn that the attacks could inflict suffering on civilians, create a new wave of refugees and</p>

further erode Ukraine's war-shattered economy. Many Ukrainian cities are heated from centralized plants that require both electricity and gas to function, meaning the attacks could be particularly devastating.

Western officials have condemned the attacks on infrastructure as a war crime, saying they are intended to sow terror in the civilian population. The campaign has been relentless and highly strategic — unlike the Russian military's ground tactics, which often seem ill-conceived, Ukrainian officials said.

"All the drones they're using, missiles, everything is targeting energy infrastructure," Ukrainian Energy Minister German Galushchenko said in an interview. "They have some kind of road map for the militaries, where to shell. If they missed one day, then the next day they shell it again and again."

The attacks are also proving enormously difficult to defend against, and officials said there was little they could do to harden the system against the strikes, which Russia has conducted with barrages of long-range missiles and attack drones.

"The goal of this is to create the most possible obstacles to reconnect quickly," Galushchenko said. "Every day, shelling to infrastructure makes us closer to bigger problems."

Another goal is to broadly hobble Ukraine's ability to support its troops on the front lines.

Ukraine's backers in Europe and Asia have promised to provide more powerful air defense systems and to rush equipment and other assistance to help rebuild critical infrastructure. But many of the air defense systems are complicated to use, require extensive training and have been slow to arrive.

Previously, when power plants or transmission lines came under attack, Ukrainian energy officials were able to reroute electricity around the problem, using their country's thick web of Soviet and post-Soviet energy infrastructure to bypass problems. But that resilience is eroding quickly, officials said.

And repairs to the damaged infrastructure are pointless so long as Russia can attack the same targets again and again. Most of the substations and transformers need to sit aboveground and many need to be clear of obstructions around them, making them easy targets.

"The rules of the game are unfair," said Volodymyr Kudrytskyi, the chief executive of Ukrenergo, the country's main grid operator. "It is much quicker and easier to launch a missile and destroy the equipment or the object than to renovate it."

Replacing specialized transformers and other substation infrastructure is especially difficult because they often must be custom-built, a process that can take months, experts said.

Kudrytskyi and others said they saw the spectral presence of their Russian energy counterparts in the decisions behind what is being hit, as though people just like them were planning the strategy. Russia and Ukraine's grids are technically similar, since they were part of the same country until 1991, and Soviet-era infrastructure maps can still provide a road map to destruction.

"They are obviously targeting those substations and power plants which are most crucial for some regions, particular regions or for the power system in general as a whole," Kudrytskyi said. They know "where to strike to inflict as much damage as possible. Because their target is terror. Their intention is to disconnect as many people from the grid as possible to create this panic."

For now, Kudrytskyi said, 90 percent of Ukrainians have had their power restored within a day of an attack. "The problem," he said, "is that the safety buffer of the system is getting lower. At the current rate of destruction, there is no such stock that could be sufficient to last for months or years."

Authorities have begun asking residents to stop using power-hungry appliances, and they have imposed planned blackouts of several hours at a time in Kyiv and cities around the country.

Many local governments have switched away from electric trolley-buses to diesel-powered ones, one of several measures they are taking to conserve electricity. The scheduled blackouts help ease the burden on the grid and give energy companies precious hours to scramble repair teams and reroute electricity flows across the undamaged parts of their transmission network.

“My personal assessment is that they can hardly create a total blackout in the country,” said Olena Pavlenko, the president of DiXi Group, a Kyiv-based energy consultancy. “There will still be a possibility to have electricity supply in all regions. But they will create a situation where we have longer interruptions of electricity supplies in the cities.”

The attacks have started to create a new calculus among Ukrainians.

For those in the east and center of the country, many of whom had only recently returned to their homes after spending months abroad or in the country’s west, it raised the possibility that they might need to flee again. Even for those who intend to stay, conversations have begun over what needs to be done to prepare for a winter potentially without heat and electricity for extended periods.

“When you have to stay without electricity, you have this feeling that you are in constant danger,” said Pavlenko, who added that her own apartment in Kyiv had been without power for four hours that afternoon. “You are not able to live as you lived before. It’s terrorizing in all regions.”

One recent news report advised residential buildings to place emergency packages in elevators, in case inhabitants found themselves stuck between floors during a power outage. In one apartment building, the contents included a flashlight, water, cookies, as well as two adult diapers and a light sedative.

At the bottom of the list of contents on the package, a request was written: “Please, do not use the contents if you don’t need to, and replace what you use.”

Ukraine’s power generation capacity plunged in the early weeks of the war after Russia captured its Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, the largest atomic power stations in Europe. But with much of the country’s industry idled by the conflict, power demands are also far lower than during peacetime.

Ukraine is still able to generate enough electricity for its needs — and until just two weeks ago, was actually exporting its surplus to European neighbors. But its ability to move electricity from power plants, many of which are in Ukraine’s north and west, to the places where it is needed, near the front lines in the south and east, is rapidly diminishing.

“The main target of the Russians’ attack is to create a situation the Ukrainian system can’t work jointly,” said Oleksandr Kharchenko, the managing director of the Kyiv-based think tank Energy Industry Research Center. “They want to split it into several parts. We can clearly see this plan.”

Another objective — after Russia has run into battlefield challenges on the front lines and is retreating from the southern city of Kherson and other areas — is to undermine the Ukrainian military from the rear.

“This is a completely different way how Russia is now targeting infrastructure,” said Artur Lorkowski, the director of the Vienna-based Energy Community Secretariat, an international organization affiliated with the European Union that has been coordinating efforts to direct spare parts and infrastructure assistance to Kyiv. “This is something that makes me scared about the future.”

Lorkowski said targeting the energy network could lead to civilian suffering that outstrips the already grievous toll of the war, which on Monday entered its ninth month.

“I would like to be wrong, but if the intensity of the shelling is kept by the Russians, you could expect a really, really tough winter,” Lorkowski said in a phone interview from the Polish-Ukrainian border, where he was returning after a visit to Kyiv focused on aid efforts. “They’re trying to push the people to a crisis situation through limited or no access to electricity and heat during wintertime.”

The attacks on energy infrastructure have led to calls for allies to step in to help, both with air defenses and with spare parts for the power system.

The Biden administration said it was trying. “We are working with the Ukrainians and regional and allied partners to see what can be done to shore up some alternative sources of energy for them as winter approach,” National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said. He added that the United States was working hard to make sure Ukrainians can “improve their air defense capabilities.”

Poland recently presented the European Commission with a list of Ukraine’s most urgent infrastructure needs.

The list, drawn up with Kyiv, outlines the need for items such as mobile cranes, vehicles for transporting reinforced concrete poles, miles of power cable and more than a dozen types of transformers, as well as submersible pumps, surge limiters and chain saws, among other things.

A Polish diplomat, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss ongoing talks, said diplomats from E.U. member countries had been briefed on the letter. “More and more member states understand the situation and I think they want to help,” the diplomat said.

Some of the needed material could be sourced from the European Union, the diplomat said, while other items may need to be ordered from elsewhere, potentially with financial support from E.U. countries. Even before the latest round of Russian attacks, E.U. nations were donating generators, repair kits and transformers.

Kudrytskyi, the Ukrenergo chief executive, said he felt he was in a race to make repairs faster than Russian shelling could destroy his work. “It’s a very dangerous situation,” he said, “and we do not know their abilities for destruction.”

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HEADLINE	10/25 Putin insider blasts Russia military effort
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/10/25/putin-insider-prigozhin-blasts-russian-generals-ukraine/
GIST	<p>The confidant who vented to Russian President Vladimir Putin recently about his military’s handling of the war in Ukraine was Yevgeniy Prigozhin, the founder of a Russian mercenary group that is playing a critical role for Moscow on the battlefield in Ukraine, according to two U.S. officials familiar with the matter.</p> <p>Prigozhin’s criticisms echoed what he has been saying publicly for weeks, the officials said, speaking anonymously to discuss sensitive intelligence. But the revelation that he felt comfortable sharing such a harsh rebuke of the Russian military effort with Putin in a private setting shows how his influence is rising as Moscow’s war falters. It also highlights the shaky standing of the Russian defense establishment’s formal leadership, which has come under fire from Prigozhin and others after months of battlefield errors and losses.</p> <p>The Washington Post previously reported that a Russian insider confronted Putin personally to spotlight mismanagement of the war effort but did not name that individual. The Post reported that the exchange was considered significant enough to include in the daily intelligence briefing provided to President Biden.</p> <p>Prigozhin’s frustration with the Russian Defense Ministry and his growing tension with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu are also the subject of a separate U.S. intelligence report that has been circulating among officials in Washington, according to people who have read the file.</p> <p>For years, Prigozhin operated in the shadows of Russian power, denying links to Russia’s notorious Wagner mercenary group and the St. Petersburg internet troll factory that U.S. authorities said he financed</p>

to meddle in the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign. He helped advance the Kremlin's foreign aims outside formal structures, and earned the nickname "Putin's chef" owing to his ownership of a St. Petersburg restaurant Putin once frequented and a catering company boasting lucrative Russian state and city contracts.

But in recent weeks, Prigozhin has stepped into the open in a dramatic debut in Russian public life, admitting his leadership of Wagner for the first time and [publicly assailing](#) the Russian military leadership for its mistakes.

"That's the political public position that he has been striking: I am Yevgeniy Prigozhin. I'm here to tell you the truth, and I'll get the job done," said a U.S. official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the matter's sensitivity and speaking generally about Prigozhin, not about the intelligence regarding his interactions with Putin.

According to the U.S. intelligence report that has been circulating in Washington, Prigozhin has expressed his view that the Russian Defense Ministry relies too much on Wagner and is not giving the mercenary group sufficient money and resources to fulfill its mission in the conflict, the people who read the report said.

U.S. intelligence officials believe that Prigozhin staged a recent video on social media depicting Wagner soldiers complaining about a lack of basic food and provisions as a means of pressuring the Kremlin to boost funding to his mercenary group.

"Prigozhin's decision to confront Putin is only the latest sign of his dissatisfaction," said a person who read the report.

Prigozhin denied recent personal contact with Putin in comments to The Washington Post made late Monday through his press service.

"First, I did not communicate personally with Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin either recently or in any foreseeable future. I did not criticize the management of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation during the conflict in Ukraine. Therefore, I cannot comment on anything," he said, adding that he had no right to criticize or praise the work of Russia's armed forces since he was not a military expert.

He also said he had not seen a video of Wagner forces complaining about food and provisions.

Prigozhin often harshly criticizes journalists who ask him questions and at times has told Russian reporters to go to the front and fight against Ukraine. In addition to his denials, Prigozhin issued a rambling, sexist diatribe against U.S. journalism and the Post, referring to "bazaar women in the kitchen, who collect gossip and speculation" and complaining of "ridiculous provocative and offensive questions."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov declined to comment on the interaction between Prigozhin and Putin. Since the war started, Prigozhin has used Defense Minister Shoigu and top uniformed generals as his foils, positioning himself as a no-holds-barred leader able to show results on the battlefield in Ukraine.

His paramilitary group — staffed by battle-hardened veterans [accused of human rights violations](#) who operate outside the formal Russian military structure — has been [waging an offensive to take Bakhmut](#), a city in the Donetsk region held by Ukrainian forces. Some analysts see it as an attempt to show that his soldiers can make progress even while the rest of the Russian military is on the back foot.

The result is an apparent revival of his status in Putin's inner circle, which [reportedly](#) had been jeopardized before the war by squabbling with top Russian officials.

"He has been really rising all these last months," said Marlene Laruelle, director of the Institute for European, Russia and Eurasian Studies at George Washington University. "The war gave him the possibility of accessing Putin more than ever before."

With figures such as Prigozhin and Kremlin-appointed Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov publicly voicing criticism of the Russian military, “the shadow aspect of the Russian state is becoming more and more visible,” Laruelle said.

The interaction between Putin and Prigozhin has been followed by a more ruthless Russian approach to the war.

After the Russian military’s repeated setbacks, which involved losing more than 3,000 square miles of territory, Putin for the first time chose an overall commander to lead the Ukraine war effort. The appointment this month filled a leadership void that military analysts had cited as one reason Moscow had been struggling with the command and control of its forces.

Prigozhin hailed Putin’s choice in a statement released by his catering company on the Russian social media site VK, calling Sergey Surovikin, the new general in charge, a “legendary character” born to serve the Motherland and “the most competent commander” in the Russian military. Surovikin earned the nickname “General Armageddon” in Syria after the Russian military became known for its indiscriminate attacks on civilian targets.

In Ukraine, Russia has also recently pivoted to harsher tactics impacting civilians, particularly after the humiliating bombing in early October of the Crimean Bridge linking Russia to Crimea. Moscow has landed missiles in the center of Kyiv for the first time in months and taken aim at Ukrainian energy infrastructure with a limited supply of precision-guided munitions to cause blackouts. And it has begun to use Iranian combat drones to hit critical infrastructure and terrorize civilians.

Hard-liners, including those who support Prigozhin, had long been urging the Kremlin to use more scorched-earth tactics against urban centers, regardless of their impact on Ukraine’s civilian population. Putin’s latest moves have played to them.

“He thinks he still can win, which is why he’s throwing everything he can at the situation,” said Fiona Hill, a former senior White House official handling Russian and Eurasian affairs. “We’re in that period now where he’s trying to push us into his version of the endgame. The guy thinks he can pull it off.”

Earlier this month, Prigozhin said in a statement posted to social media that the Russian military’s top brass was out of touch with the situation on the ground in Ukraine. “I think that we should send all these bastards barefoot to the front with machine guns,” he said.

It’s unclear if Prigozhin is primarily focused on wresting more influence within the Russian defense establishment or if he harbors greater political ambitions for himself or those close to him.

With public criticism of Putin still taboo, Shoigu has borne the brunt of frustration over the conflict and in recent months has been “sidelined within the Russian leadership, with operational commanders briefing President Putin directly on the course of the war,” according to an assessment by Britain’s Defense Ministry in August.

The ministry said Shoigu is struggling to overcome his reputation as “lacking substantive military experience, as he spent most of his career in the construction sector and the Ministry of Emergency Situations.”

Prigozhin, meanwhile, is presenting himself as a more extreme, unvarnished alternative.

A video that began circulating on Russian social media in September showed Prigozhin recruiting potential fighters at a Russian prison. Prigozhin later responded to criticism of his prisoner recruitment efforts in a statement released on VK by his catering firm.

“Those who do not want mercenaries or prisoners to fight ... who do not like this topic, send your children to the front,” Prigozhin said. “It’s either them or your children, decide for yourself.” About a week later, Putin ordered a mobilization of what the Russian Defense Ministry said would be 300,000 reservists to replenish depleted forces. The move sent hundreds of thousands of eligible men fleeing Russia to avoid being called to battle.

Before the war began to go badly for the Russian military, “it wasn’t propitious” for critics to seize the spotlight. But “people like Prigozhin now see a chance to grab for the brass ring,” said Hill, now a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution’s Center on the United States and Europe. “This really shows the system is under stress, when people start pushing themselves forward like this.”

Prigozhin has risen far above his humble roots as a hot dog vendor in Putin’s home city of Leningrad. He spent nine years in prison for robbery and other crimes, then co-founded casinos and a floating restaurant, where he personally served Putin, then Russia’s new president, as well as President George W. Bush. He then opened a catering business that won contracts with the Russian government. After years of denials, he only recently publicly admitted he founded Wagner in May 2014 to support Russian-backed separatists in their effort to seize control of the Donbas region of Ukraine.

The U.S. Treasury Department imposed new sanctions on Prigozhin in March due to the Wagner Group’s involvement in the war. Prior to that, he was already sanctioned and indicted by the United States for financing the Internet Research Agency, a Russian troll factory that U.S. intelligence agencies said was part of a Kremlin effort to interfere in the 2016 election. The United States has said the group has sought to spread “false narratives online” seeking to undermine governments in the U.S., Asia, Europe and elsewhere.

His years in prison and hardscrabble beginnings likely built resentment against the political elites and those who enjoyed privilege after the Soviet Union’s collapse, Laruelle said.

The war has aided his ambition. “He wants political recognition,” she said. “Money is not enough. I think he really cares about having an official status.”

The increasingly prominent public role of figures such as Prigozhin and Kadyrov in the war effort is irritating some Russian officials, who see them as rogue actors who play by their own rules. “To have leaders like Prigozhin and Kadyrov — they [the establishment] can’t live with this any more,” one Russian official said in an interview. “This is not Russia. It’s a criminal brotherhood based on the principles of the Middle Ages.”

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HEADLINE	10/24 Schools got \$122B last year, still unspent
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/10/24/covid-spending-schools-students-achievement/
GIST	<p>In March 2021, the Biden administration released the federal government’s largest pool of pandemic relief for public schools. The American Rescue Plan infused campuses with \$122 billion to reopen buildings, address mental health needs and help students who had fallen behind academically.</p> <p>The need was so urgent that two-thirds of the money — \$81 billion — was released less than two weeks after the plan was signed into law and before the Education Department could approve each state’s spending plan.</p> <p>But despite having access to the dollars, school systems throughout the country reported spending less than 15 percent of the federal funding, known as ESSER III, the most recent installment of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief, during the 2021-2022 school year, according to a Washington Post analysis of data collected by Edunomics, an education finance group at Georgetown University.</p> <p>The spending rates varied considerably between states, and even among school districts within a state. But the trend of a slow rollout was especially apparent in some of the school districts that have incurred the steepest learning losses in English and math, according to the data. About half of the 211 districts</p>

The Post examined, where Edunomics estimates students are the furthest behind, spent 5 percent or less of their ESSER III money last school year, the data shows.

Meanwhile, national test scores in [elementary school math and reading](#) have plunged to levels that haven't been seen in decades, and education advocates worry that children continue to fall behind. "The excuse in education has always been, 'We don't have enough money,'" said Keri Rodrigues, president of education advocacy group the National Parents Union. "Now we have a historic amount of spending, like never before, and you're not even spending the money."

The money was not spent for a variety of reasons — including delayed access to funds, a nationwide educator shortage that has made it hard to fill new positions, and a desire to make the money last, according to interviews with school officials and education experts in six states. ESSER III expires in September 2024, well after two earlier rounds of relief funding dry up, and school leaders say they want to stretch it as long as possible.

But while the money sits — much of which is slated to go toward tutoring and other measures to catch students up academically — millions of children continue to struggle in core subjects, the consequences of which might not be known for years.

School district leaders, however, insist they are making progress — particularly this school year as they plan to dip deeper into the remaining money. The vast majority of funds have already been committed to "critical needs," such as addressing student mental health and reversing learning loss, and will be spent over the next two years, according to the White House and outside analyses of thousands of school districts' spending plans. Many expenses, such as staff salaries, can only be drawn down gradually, officials added.

And in many cases districts are still spending earlier waves of federal funding, a total of \$67.5 billion released during the Trump administration that helped schools pivot to virtual learning and retrofit buildings to reduce the spread of the coronavirus. The White House said the passage of the American Rescue Plan expedited spending of those earlier rounds, and overall monthly pandemic education spending increased eightfold between February 2021 and August 2022.

Districts also explain the slow rate of spending by pointing to staffing shortages and supply chain disruptions that have made it difficult to fulfill their plans, as well as bureaucratic hurdles and reporting lags.

The state education agency in Maryland, for example, reports that Baltimore has not spent any of its relief dollars. Kimberly Hoffman, executive director of data monitoring and compliance for the school district of more than 77,000 children, said 14 percent of the grant has now been spent.

"We didn't even have approval from the state to start spending it until October 2021," Hoffman said. "A lot of our planning on using that third pot of ESSER funds is really what's going to happen this year in the '22-23 school year and next year, in 2023-24."

Using factors including test scores, family poverty data and the number of weeks students spent in remote learning, [Edunomics estimates](#) that children in Baltimore have lost an average of 18 weeks of learning in math and 15 weeks in reading. Remedying that could total \$177.8 million in tutoring costs — 40 percent of the city's ESSER III allotment — researchers estimate.

Hoffman said roughly half of Baltimore's \$443 million award is slated to address learning loss, much of which will take the form of tutoring as the district expands programs that started before the pandemic. In the months after ESSER III was announced, officials created a spending plan that included \$39 million to pay teachers to tutor over the summer and \$57 million to hire outside help for summer learning programs. That spending started this year and will continue over the summers of 2023 and 2024.

Millions more will be poured into one-on-one instruction, online tutoring and after-school learning programs — including \$9 million to bring in outside organizations to tutor students in 100 schools over two years, according to the district.

Baltimore's budget for the federal funding also includes more opportunities for students who failed courses to regain credits, as well as money to hire bus drivers, purchase WiFi hotspots for families and address long-neglected infrastructure needs — from bathroom renovations to air-conditioning installations.

Schools have been given wide latitude in determining how to use the money, though at least 20 percent must be spent to address learning loss. Schools have reported purchasing new curriculums, furniture and school supplies. At least 31 of the 100 largest school districts in the country are paying teachers bonuses, according to FutureEd, another Georgetown education research group.

Some districts have shied away from purchases that can't be sustained once the money runs dry, such as new positions or salary increases, although dozens have reported doing so anyway. In North Carolina, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg County school district said it would use \$5.8 million to hire about 400 "guest teachers," whose positions are set to expire at the same time as the funding.

But most districts are eager to reverse the academic damage cause by the pandemic. The influx of federal dollars presents an opportunity to give unprecedented support to "kids who weren't getting the educational opportunities they needed before the pandemic," including children from low-income families, English language learners and students with special education needs, said Segun Eubanks, a professor and director of the University of Maryland's Center for Education Innovation and Improvement.

In the nation's capital, Edunomics estimates that students in the public school system are 20 weeks behind in math and 12 weeks behind in reading, which could cost more than \$116 million to reverse. The district has reported spending less than 3 percent of its nearly \$195 million allotment, according to the District's state superintendent of education. The city's charter schools, which are publicly funded and privately operated by nonprofit organizations called local education agencies, were awarded about \$152.8 million.

Chris Bergfalk, a veteran D.C. public school teacher, said last school year — when most children came back to the building — was the hardest of his 20-year career. He returned to his fifth-grade classroom a mile from the Capitol to children who were traumatized.

In school, children eat two to three meals a day. They can talk to social workers and get after-school care. But when buildings closed, those services disappeared in many cases, Bergfalk said. Now teachers are seeing the effects.

"I have students who are at the beginning reading level, which means they can't read, and I have students who are in the 99th percentile," he said. One of the higher-scoring students, he added, said their parent hired a tutor while schools were closed.

In many cases, a child's academic standing can be traced to whether consistent internet access was available at home, said Eric Teutsch, a high school Spanish teacher in Youngstown, Ohio. Schools recorded attendance issues throughout the pandemic as children struggled to get online, and when they came back to the classroom "they were behind academically and socially," Teutsch said. Edunomics estimates it will cost \$12.6 million to catch kids up who are, on average, 20 weeks behind in math and 16 weeks behind in reading.

Pinpointing the exact amount of learning loss incurred through the pandemic is tricky, and districts have different ways of measuring progress. But it is widely understood that schools are contending with a crisis.

Tennessee's state department of education is awarding extra state funding to districts and charter schools that spend half of their ESSER III award on academics and participate in a multiyear tutoring program. In D.C., officials are pouring \$40 million into frequent, small-group tutoring, with plans to provide services to more than 8,000 children over the next two academic years. This type of tutoring, often called "high-impact," is among the best methods to accelerate learning, research indicates.

Consistency and continuity are also needed for an effective tutoring regime. But spending federal dollars has been challenging in the absence of qualified people who can make the commitment, said Jonathan Travers, a partner at Education Resource Strategies. The Massachusetts-based nonprofit helps school districts determine how best to use their resources.

At first it was hard to find teachers who could take on the extra workload, Travers said. Schools started outsourcing to local organizations, community partners and nearby universities to fill the gap. But with nearly every school district in the country embarking on the same strategy, even those positions are hard to fill.

The case has been the same with other staff positions — from teachers to bus drivers to mental health professionals. Districts set out last year to hire counselors to help children cope with the emotional fallout of spending months at home, around sick relatives or in neighborhoods beset by surging violent crime. Morgan County Schools, a rural district of about 2,100 students in West Virginia, is contending not only with the pandemic but an opioid epidemic. Officials planned to hire a school psychologist, a behavior support specialist and a social worker.

So far, the social worker position has been filled, said Kristen Tuttle, the district's superintendent. The behavior support role was changed to a special education coach to make the position easier to fill, but the district has not been able to find a qualified candidate to take on the psychologist job, she added. The school system has reported using about 10 percent of its \$4.7 million ESSER III allotment.

But even with plans in place, some districts acknowledge they are behind on spending, said Travers, who is working with about 30 urban and suburban school systems. "In some cases, probably, the plan review and approval took longer than they assumed," he said. "I think the majority of cases, though, were about challenges getting management capacity to get spending initiatives kicked off."

Education experts also warn the data available about ESSER III use do not fully capture what is happening in schools. The figure that gets reported — whether it's zero, 5 or 31 percent of funding spent — reflects only how much money a district has requested from the state. School districts are not sitting on those dollars, they say, but rather tapping into local funds and getting reimbursed later.

"That's one of the reasons there's a difference between the budget and the plan to utilize funds versus actually pulling the money down, receiving it in your bank account and using it to pay someone," said Dean Zajic, assistant director of special education and title services for the Kansas State Department of Education.

In Yakima, Wash., officials say slow spending is intentional. The district has requested 20 percent of its \$56.1 million ESSER III allotment, state data show.

Jenny Rodriguez, assistant superintendent of teaching and learning, said the district has focused on spending the first two rounds of relief before tapping into ESSER III. Students in Yakima schools lost an average of 22 weeks of math and 21 weeks of reading, Edunomics estimates, which would cost \$47.8 million to reverse.

"Rather than a huge fire hose of funding in a single year, or even two years," Rodriguez said, "we've been intentional to think about how do we stretch this funding to have supports for students as long as possible?"

	<p>In Youngstown, however, the public school district is more than three-quarters of the way through its \$50 million ESSER III grant.</p> <p>Justin Jennings, the system’s superintendent, said it’s because officials started requesting money early. “When other people were buying hotspots and laptops, we already had them on the way,” he said.</p> <p>The district of more than 4,000 students also requested funding for big-ticket expenses, from air conditioning units to roofing repairs. Officials bought 48 new school buses, Jennings said, adding that some of the older vehicles “should have been out of service years ago.”</p> <p>But one thing that has stumped Jennings, and school leaders throughout the country, is how to sustain some of these purchases. For example, many districts in 2020 became one-to-one device districts overnight, meaning that, for the first time, every student had a laptop. But those devices last, at most, five years, Jennings said — at which point officials will have to figure out how to replace hundreds of devices.</p> <p>In Baltimore, Zabrina Harris, a middle school special educator, said she is proud of how her district has addressed education deficits. Although her students are behind, they are still making progress, she said.</p> <p>But she also understands the reality. Children in the city — for myriad reasons, from poverty to exposure to violence — have long trailed their peers across the state. In districts like that, it may take more than one-time federal relief to reverse years of underinvestment.</p> <p>“They may never meet certain standards,” Harris said. “But will they be readers and writers and thinkers? Yes, they will. I have faith in that.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Russia doubles-down dirty bomb claim
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/25/russia-ukraine-war-latest-updates/
GIST	<p>Russia apparently intends to raise at the U.N. Security Council its unfounded accusation that Ukraine is planning to use a “dirty bomb” — an explosive weapon designed to scatter radioactive material — on its own soil. Russian Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya, in a letter to the council that was seen by Reuters, urged Western nations “to exert their influence” on Kyiv to prevent what he called a potential “act of nuclear terrorism.” The United States and other Western powers have dismissed Russia’s claim as “transparently false.”</p> <p>Here’s the latest on the war and its ripple effects across the globe.</p> <p>Key developments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia would face consequences if it used a dirty bomb in Ukraine, State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters on Monday. The United States, France and Britain accused Moscow of using allegations of a dirty bomb as a pretext for escalation. “It would certainly be another example of [Russian President Vladimir Putin’s] brutality if he were to use a so-called dirty bomb,” Price said. “There would be consequences for Russia. ... We’ve been very clear about that.” • The U.N. nuclear watchdog is preparing to visit two sites linked to the nuclear industry at Kyiv’s request. A Russian officer previously claimed without evidence that Ukraine was using the locations in Kyiv and Dnipropetrovsk to prepare the bomb. “The IAEA inspected one of these locations one month ago,” International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Grossi said in a statement. “No undeclared nuclear activities or material were found there.” • Russia has lost over a quarter of its fleet of attack helicopters in the war, Britain’s Defense Ministry said. At least 23 of the Russian Air Force’s operational Ka-52 HOKUM attack helicopters have been verified as lost in Ukraine since February. Ka-52s are “one of the few options available” to Russian commanders “to provide close support for troops in combat,” according to the ministry’s daily intelligence briefing, but it comes with a high risk of “attrition

	<p>from Ukrainian man-portable air defence systems.” Overall, the ministry said, “Russia is still failing to maintain adequate air superiority” in Ukraine.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russian state media and officials reported that a car bomb exploded outside the offices of Russian broadcaster ZaTV in the southern Ukrainian city of Melitopol, which Russia captured soon after its invasion. It wasn’t immediately clear who was behind the attack, but occupation authorities said Tuesday that five people were injured. Unverified photos and images from the scene showed severe damage to the building, including blown-out windows and debris on fire. • Ukraine’s intelligence chief said there is no evidence that Russian troops are readying for a mass withdrawal from Kherson, a strategic southern port city occupied in the early days of the conflict, despite a push by Moscow-backed officials to get residents to leave. Gen. Kyrylo O. Budanov said in an interview with the news outlet Ukrainska Pravda that Moscow was “trying to create the illusion that everything is lost,” while preparing to defend the city in street-by-street combat. • Recent reports on military operations in the area have not made enough of a distinction between activities in the city and those in the surrounding Kherson oblast to suggest that Russia is retreating, according to the Institute for the Study of War. “Russian forces have begun a partial withdrawal from northwestern Kherson Oblast even while preparing to defend Kherson City,” analysts at the U.S.-based think tank said. Still, they noted that Russia’s position in the upper Kherson region is “untenable” and that Ukraine will probably recapture the area by year’s end.
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HEADLINE	10/24 Report: plastic recycling is disaster, myth
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/qjlxmp/plastic-recycling-is-a-disaster-and-a-myth-report-says
GIST	<p>A new report from Greenpeace USA paints a dire picture for recycling efforts in the United States: They’ve fundamentally failed.</p> <p>"The plastics and products industries have been promoting plastic recycling as the solution to plastic waste since the early 1990s. Some 30 years later, the vast majority of U.S. plastic waste is still not recyclable," the report reads. "The U.S. plastic recycling rate was estimated to have declined to about 5-6% in 2021, down from a high of 9.5% in 2014 and 8.7% in 2018, when the U.S. exported millions of tons of plastic waste to China and counted it as recycled even though much of it was burned or dumped."</p> <p>In 2020, Greenpeace USA published a survey of plastic recycling in America that looked at about 370 material recovery facilities (MRFs) as part of a larger survey of America's capacity for domestic plastic waste reprocessing. One key result was that only some types of plastic containers could actually be recycled—specifically PET#1 and HDPE#2—but that MRFs regularly accepted other types of plastics, then disposed of them because there was no "end-market buyer." But it gets worse: PET#1 and HDPE#2 are hardly recyclable themselves, falling well below a 30 percent threshold established by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's New Plastics Economy initiative.</p> <p>Recycling plastic waste fails for a variety of reasons that Greenpeace boils down to: the impossibility of collection and sorting, the environmental toxicity, synthetic compositions and contamination, and a lack of economic feasibility.</p> <p>There are thousands of different types of plastics with different compositions that cannot be recycled together, let alone sorted. Plastic recycling facilities are likely to catch on fire because plastic is flammable, and living near one poses a huge health risk—take Turkey, which became a new plastic waste export destination after China banned imports and saw an influx of EU waste expose workers and communities to new health risks. Plastics can also absorb toxic chemicals, further complicating recycling efforts and increasing their toxicity. On top of all this, recycled plastic costs more than new plastic because of the aforementioned factors encouraging companies to simply make more instead of pursuing alternatives.</p>

	<p>Greenpeace points to a 2022 interview with Craig Cookson, senior director of plastics sustainability at the American Chemistry Council, where Cookson insists it "is a little bit more in its infancy compared to paper and aluminum and steel." That's an interesting way to talk about an industry that has existed for about three decades. But this sort of rhetoric, which Greenpeace dismisses as a delaying tactic, tracks with what recent investigations have found.</p> <p>In 2020, NPR and PBS Frontline spent months looking into the recycling industry and found that "the industry sold the public on an idea it knew wouldn't work—that the majority of plastic could be, and would be, recycled—all while making billions of dollars selling the world new plastic." In 2022, The Atlantic ran an essay titled "Plastic Recycling Doesn't Work and Will Never Work" which argued the industry was lying to the public about fundamental roadblocks to plastic waste recycling in part because of how profitable keeping up the facade was.</p> <p>Scientists are rapidly making new breakthroughs on how to more easily recycle certain types of plastic or even mixed plastics that normally get sent to the landfill today, using a mixture of chemical and biological processes. Still, there is an even better path forward: abandoning the idea that single-use plastics can and should continue to be used.</p> <p>"Will we allow companies to continue to promote the failed, toxic plastic recycling myth or will we demand a pivotal change that dramatically reduces the production of single-use plastics? Instead of continuing on this false path, companies in the U.S. and around the world must urgently phase out single-use plastics by replacing their packaging with reuse and refill systems and offering packaging-free products."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 Post-Ian: surge 'flesh-eating' bacteria in Fla.
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/pandemic-biohazard/surge-of-flesh-eating-bacteria-infections-plagues-florida-following-hurricane-ian/
GIST	<p>When Hurricane Ian slammed into Lee County, Florida, as a near-Category 5 storm last month, it left in its wake not just widespread destruction but also a surge of rare "flesh-eating" bacterial infections, state health data shows.</p> <p>Flesh-eating bacteria can cause "necrotizing fasciitis" — an infection that triggers aggressive inflammation in the tissue surrounding muscles and other organs, causing that tissue to rapidly die, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (opens in new tab) (CDC). The bacteria enter the body through broken skin, and necrotizing fasciitis can set in quickly thereafter, leading to life-threatening complications like shock and organ failure. Up to 20% of people with necrotizing fasciitis die, some within days of the infection's start.</p> <p>The type of flesh-eating bacteria behind Florida's surge in infections is called <i>Vibrio vulnificus</i>. The salt-loving bacteria can be found in warm, brackish water, meaning a mix of fresh and salt water typically found in estuaries, salt marshes and the points where rivers meet the ocean, according to the CDC (opens in new tab).</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 Iran staging war games near Iraq
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/oct/24/iran-staging-war-games-near-iraq/
GIST	<p>Iran is staging military maneuvers that are expected to last three days in a northwestern province bordering Iraq's Kurdish-controlled territory, according to media reports on Monday.</p> <p>The war games come amid protests throughout Iran sparked by the mid-September death in custody of Mahsa Amini, 22. She had been arrested on charges of violating the country's strict dress codes, with witnesses saying authorities had beaten her.</p>

	<p>Units with the Iranian army's 164th Mobile Assault Battalion will take part in the maneuvers, according to the U.K.-based Iran International news agency.</p> <p>"The forces partaking in the exercise use organizational, light, semi-heavy, and heavy weapons," said Col. Hamid Firouzjani, the unit's commander.</p> <p>Among other drills, the Iranian troops will carry out parachute operations, overnight raids and urban warfare training over three days.</p> <p>The war games are taking place soon after Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) conducted maneuvers along the borders of Armenia and Azerbaijan, which have been involved in clashes over the Nagorno-Karabakh region in the South Caucasus, Iran International said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 San Francisco flush \$1.7M public toilet?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/oct/24/san-francisco-1-million-public-toilet
GIST	<p>Controversy is swirling around a proposed public lavatory in San Francisco after a city newspaper exposed the project's eye-watering price tag of \$1.7m.</p> <p>That sum would have covered a 150-sq-ft restroom with just one toilet. The pricey plans were moving ahead until the San Francisco Chronicle lifted the lid on how much taxpayer money would go down the drain, prompting backlash and ridicule.</p> <p>Even California's governor, Gavin Newsom, has weighed in, saying that "A single, small bathroom should not cost \$1.7m."</p> <p>"The state will hold funding until San Francisco delivers a plan to use this public money more efficiently. If they cannot, we will go back to the legislature to revoke this appropriation," a spokesperson told the Chronicle.</p> <p>The public toilet, intended for a town square in the Noe Valley neighborhood, would be a boon for a city that has too few. Visitors to the park have been requesting a toilet for years, the Chronicle's Heather Knight notes.</p> <p>But the costs involved have sparked an uproar, even from the state official who obtained the funding. Adding to the frustrations: the project isn't expected to be completed until 2025. "I'm glad that Noe Valley will at some point get a bathroom, but it shouldn't cost this much and it shouldn't take this long, and I'm angry about it," the Democratic state assemblymember Matt Haney told the Chronicle.</p> <p>He said the city's recreation and parks department had told him the figure and he hadn't initially questioned it amid local demand for a place to go. "They told me \$1.7m, and I got \$1.7m," he said. "I didn't have the option of bringing home less of the bacon when it comes to building a toilet. A half a toilet or a toilet-maybe-someday is not much use to anyone."</p> <p>Still, he said, that kind of money should pay for seven bathrooms. Indeed, an executive with a trade group based in Virginia told Knight that Los Angeles had recently seen that many facilities installed for the same price using modular construction, in which sections of a building are created elsewhere and transported to their eventual home. (The San Francisco recreation and parks department lists the cost of a prefabricated version of the restroom as \$1,216,800, according to a price breakdown provided to the Guardian.)</p> <p>So, how can one toilet cost so much? The construction itself comes in at \$1.05m, with the rest going to tasks such as architecture (\$300,000), project management (\$175,000) and surveying (\$40,000), according to the breakdown.</p>

	<p>Such a cost isn't so unusual in San Francisco, a city grappling with vast income inequality and one of the highest rates of homelessness in the US. Two other similar bathrooms in the city cost \$1.6m and \$1.7m respectively. It's the world's most expensive city to build in, with the recreation and parks department pointing to the many departments that must approve construction as one factor. On top of that, the cost of "materials and skilled labor" are up 23.2% since the pandemic began, according to a letter to Haney from Phil Ginsburg, the recreation and parks department's general manager, that the department shared with the Guardian.</p> <p>"In New York City, stand-alone park restrooms can now cost between \$3m and \$5m," the letter continues. "Our restroom building costs are consistent with the inflationary pressures on all San Francisco public works projects."</p> <p>Indeed, toilets aren't the only items in the city threatening to give new meaning to the word "waste". San Francisco is also in the throes of a trash can conundrum as it seeks to put new bins on the streets, with prototypes costing as much as \$20,900. The Guardian tried them out – and was not hugely impressed.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Day 244 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/25/russia-ukraine-war-latest-what-we-know-on-day-244-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia's defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, has told western counterparts that the war in Ukraine is heading for an "uncontrolled escalation" amid evidence that the Kremlin is weighing how to respond to yet another anticipated battlefield defeat around the key southern city of Kherson. • Russia's grip on the city of Kherson appears increasingly fragile. Russian forces seemed to be preparing to withdraw from the east bank of the Dnieper River, ordering a fresh evacuation of civilians and laying the ground for the potential loss of the city of Kherson itself. All civilians were ordered to evacuate immediately over the weekend in the face of the advancing Ukrainian counteroffensive. • All men remaining in Kherson have been invited to join a newly formed local militia. In a notice on Telegram, the occupation authorities said men had the "opportunity" to join territorial defence units if they chose to remain in Kherson of their own free will. Compelling civilians to serve in the armed forces of an occupying power is defined as a breach of the Geneva conventions. • Russia is bringing new military units into Kherson as it prepares to defend the city in the face of the advancing Ukrainian counteroffensive, the head of Ukraine's defence intelligence directorate has said. Kyrylo Budanov also said Russia would slow Ukrainian troops' advance in the south by only about two weeks if it blows up the Kakhovka hyrdoelectric dam near Kherson. • Ukraine and the US denounced suggestions from Russia that Ukraine was preparing to use a "dirty bomb" as dangerous lies. "If Russia calls and says that Ukraine is allegedly preparing something, it means one thing: Russia has already prepared all this," Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said in a video address. The White House national security council also rejected Shoigu's claims. "The world would see through any attempt to use this allegation as a pretext for escalation," a statement said. • The UN nuclear watchdog is preparing to send inspectors in the coming days to two Ukrainian sites after Kyiv requested an expert mission be sent to disprove Russian claims that Ukraine plans to use a "dirty bomb". • The US has had no indications that Russia has decided to use a nuclear, biological or chemical weapon, a US military official has said. The US believes Russia is "keeping lines of communication open" after Moscow requested a call between US defence secretary Lloyd Austin and Russian defence minister Sergei Shoigu on Sunday, the official added. • The United Nations has said urgent steps are needed to relieve a backlog of more than 150 ships involved in a deal that allows Ukraine to export grain from ports in the Black Sea. Ukraine said Russian inspections that have been creating "significant" delays for the export of Ukrainian food products were "politically motivated" and a cause for concern.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has urged Israel to join the fight against Russia and repeated an appeal for Israeli air defence systems. Israel has condemned Russia’s invasion but has limited its assistance to deliveries of humanitarian aid and defensive equipment. Most recently it offered to help Ukrainians develop air attack alerts for civilians. Zelenskiy said that was not enough and asked that Israeli leaders reconsider sending air defences as well. • Ukraine’s special operations forces said that Iranian drone instructors have been spotted in Belarus. According to special operations forces, Iran’s Islamic revolutionary guard corps are training Russian forces in Belarus and coordinating the launches of Iranian-made drones. • A pro-Kremlin television presenter has been accused of inciting genocide after calling for Ukrainian children to be “drowned” and “burned” alive during an interview on the state-funded RT channel. Anton Krasovsky, the chief of Russian-language broadcasting for the channel formerly called Russia Today, was suspended from RT, and the head of Russia’s powerful investigative committee said it would review his remarks as part of a potential criminal investigation. • US basketball star Brittney Griner “does not expect miracles” at her appeal hearing on Tuesday, her lawyers said in a statement. The two-time Olympic gold medallist is appealing against a nine-year Russian jail term for drug possession and smuggling. Her lawyers said she would take part in Tuesday’s hearing by video link from the detention centre where she has been held, and that they expected a verdict the same day. • National leaders, development experts and CEOs will gather in Berlin on Tuesday for a conference on what its hosts say must be a Marshall plan to rebuild Ukraine after Russia’s invasion. The conference, hosted by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and the European Commission, will not involve concrete pledges of cash towards the estimated \$750bn reconstruction cost.
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HEADLINE	10/24 Russia: heading to ‘uncontrolled escalation’
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/24/ukraine-war-heading-for-uncontrolled-escalation-says-russia
GIST	<p>Russia’s defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, has told western counterparts that the war in Ukraine is heading for an “uncontrolled escalation” amid evidence that the Kremlin is weighing how to respond to yet another anticipated battlefield defeat around the key southern city of Kherson.</p> <p>With Russian troops setting up new defences for a fresh Ukrainian offensive in Luhansk in the country’s east as well, Moscow appears to be preparing the ground for yet further escalation, with discredited claims that Kyiv may be preparing to use a dirty bomb as a “false-flag operation” to blame Russia.</p> <p>Refuting the Russian allegation, Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said in an interview on Monday: “The allegation that Ukraine is preparing to use dirty bombs in Ukraine is absurd.”</p> <p>Russian officials – including Vladimir Putin – have repeatedly hinted that the Kremlin may be prepared to use a nuclear weapon as part of its so-far failed brinkmanship to discourage Kyiv and its western allies, which have been supplying Ukraine with modern weapons, intelligence and training.</p> <p>However, the Kremlin continued to push the claim of a Ukrainian dirty bomb on Monday, with Igor Kirilov, head of the Armed Forces radioactive weapons unit, saying that troops had been mobilised to work in a radioactively contaminated environment. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the threat was real. “Their distrust of the information that has been provided by the Russian side doesn’t mean that the threat of using such a dirty bomb doesn’t exist,” he told reporters.</p> <p>Shoigu discussed the “rapidly deteriorating situation” in phone calls with his British, French and Turkish counterparts and also spoke by phone with the US defence secretary, Lloyd Austin, for the second time in three days. The Pentagon said Austin told Shoigu he “rejected any pretext for Russian escalation”.</p> <p>Without providing evidence, Shoigu said Ukraine could escalate by using a “dirty bomb” – conventional explosives laced with radioactive material.</p>

Analysts have noted that a “dirty bomb” would have little utility for Ukraine on the battlefield, not least when its forces are currently retaking large swathes of territory by conventional means, instead interpreting Russia’s claim as a pretext for its own planned escalation.

In an overnight address, the Ukrainian president, [Volodymyr Zelenskiy](#), said the Russian accusation was a sign that Moscow was planning such an attack itself and would blame Ukraine.

“If Russia calls and says that Ukraine is allegedly preparing something, it means one thing: Russia has already prepared all this,” Zelenskiy said. “So when today the Russian minister of defence organises a phone carousel and calls foreign ministers with stories about the so-called ‘dirty’ nuclear bomb, everyone understands everything well. Understands who is the source of everything dirty that can be imagined in this war.”

Shoigu’s comments fit a worrying pattern of escalatory actions by Moscow as the tide of the war has turned against it, most recently with its targeting of civilian infrastructure with missiles and “kamikaze” drones after Kyiv’s attack on the Kerch strait bridge in Crimea earlier this month.

In a joint statement after the talks, Britain, France and the US said they were committed to supporting Ukraine “for as long as it takes” and rejected Russia’s warning about a “dirty bomb”.

“Our countries made clear that we all reject Russia’s transparently false allegations that Ukraine is preparing to use a dirty bomb on its own territory,” they said. “The world would see through any attempt to use this allegation as a pretext for escalation.”

Nigel Gould-Davies, a senior fellow for Russia and Eurasia and the International Institute for Strategic Affairs, commented on Twitter: “It’s Russia that is escalating: attacks on Ukraine’s energy infrastructure, apparent attacks on western connectivity infrastructure, and mining of Novaya Kakhovka dam. And playing with nuclear fire in Zaporizhzhya [nuclear power plant] for months.

“So [it’s] hard to see these calls as anything other than Shoigu either doubling down on Putin’s bluffs, or preparing way for Russian nuclear use. Yes, nuclear (ie fission [rather than a dirty bomb]). A dirty bomb would breach nuclear taboo but not achieve significant effects.”

He added: “I worry there is too much motivated reasoning in dismissing possible Russian nuclear use. We don’t want it to happen, and/or we don’t see the point, therefore it won’t. But Russia faces logic of dwindling choices as it loses. Escalation of all kinds more likely.”

The latest threats from Moscow come as Russian forces appear to be preparing to withdraw from the east bank of the Dnieper River near Kherson, ordering a fresh evacuation of civilians, and laying the ground for the potential loss of the city of Kherson itself.

About 25,000 people have been transported from the area since Tuesday, the Interfax news agency said. However, Russia-installed authorities in Kherson reported insufficient vessels to ferry people across the river at one point on Sunday, blaming a “sharp increase in the number of people wishing to leave”.

The Russian education minister, Sergei Kravtsov, said in a video message: “The situation today is difficult. It’s vital to save your lives. It won’t be for long. You will definitely return.”

Kyrylo Budanov, Ukraine’s military spy chief, warned that the reported transportation of civilians from Kherson was part of a Russian information campaign. While Russia is moving financial structures, equipment, vulnerable residents and wounded people from Kherson, he said, it is also reinforcing defences.

“They are creating the illusion that all is lost. Yet at the same time they are moving new military units in and preparing to defend the streets of Kherson,” he told the Ukrainska Pravda online media outlet.

	<p>On Monday, the region's Russian-installed administration announced the formation of a local militia, saying that all men remaining in the city could join.</p> <p>Russia accused western countries of having "essentially stolen" its gold and foreign exchange reserves via sanctions.</p> <p>Asked by reporters about an EU proposal to transfer frozen Russian assets to Ukraine, Peskov said: "In general, a part large of our assets have been essentially stolen by specific western countries."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 Iran fires teargas on student protesters
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/24/iranian-security-forces-fire-teargas-as-girls-clash-with-staff-at-tehran-school
GIST	<p>Iranian security forces fired teargas outside a girls' school in Tehran when clashes broke out after staff attempted to inspect students' mobile phones amid ongoing anti-government protests.</p> <p>Iran's Ministry of Education said several students were treated by emergency services for a drop in blood pressure, but denied that security forces had entered the school.</p> <p>But videos circulating on social media showed heavily armed security forces outside the school. One clip showed them on motorbikes and firing at least one teargas canister. The authenticity of the footage could not be independently verified.</p> <p>Unrest ignited by the death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish-Iranian woman who was detained by the Islamic Republic's morality police for "improper attire" and died in police custody, has swept Iran for five weeks. Rights groups say nearly 250 people have been killed in the crackdown.</p> <p>Women and girls have played a prominent part in the protests, removing and burning veils. The deaths of several teenage girls reportedly killed during protests have fuelled more anger.</p> <p>Demonstrations continued on Monday, with a rally at a university in the western city of Hamedan, and students shouting down a government spokesperson who visited a Tehran university, according to students' and rights groups.</p> <p>The education ministry said there was a clash at the Tehran high school between staff, students and parents after the school principal insisted on checking the girls' phones.</p> <p>The widely followed activist Twitter account Tasvir1500 said uniformed forces attacked the school and at least one girl was wounded, but the city police denied their account.</p> <p>"After news of a conflict near a high school ... police were dispatched to the area and investigated the issue which turned out to be a fight between a number of thugs," Tehran police said, adding that agitators were identified and arrested.</p> <p>Rights groups say thousands of people have been arrested in the crackdown, which started in Amini's home town of Saez in north-west Iran before spreading across the country.</p> <p>Protesters have called for an end to the religious clerical rule that has governed Iran since the 1979 Islamic revolution, and for the overthrow of the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.</p> <p>On Monday a court in Tehran indicted 315 people arrested in recent "riots" for "gathering and conspiring with intent to damage national security, propaganda against the system and igniting public disorder," state news agency Irna reported, citing a judiciary official.</p>

	<p>Four of the detainees have been charged as enemies of God, an offence which under Iran's interpretation of sharia law incurs the death penalty.</p> <p>Videos on social media showed anti-government protests at several universities, with students chanting "Death to Khamenei".</p> <p>Khamenei has warned that nobody should dare think they can uproot the Islamic Republic, and has accused adversaries of fomenting the unrest. State TV has reported the deaths of at least 26 security force members.</p> <p>At the Khajeh Nasir Toosi University of Technology in Tehran, video footage showed government spokesperson Ali Bahadori Jahromi being interrupted with chants of "Woman, life, freedom" as he addressed students, who also shouted: "We don't want a corrupt system, we don't want a murderous guest."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 Fears of greater Taiwan invasion risk
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/25/xi-jinping-party-purge-china-taiwan-invasion-risk
GIST	<p>Xi Jinping's purging of political rivals and elevation of loyalists to the top ranks of the Chinese Communist party has raised fears that his now unfettered and unquestionable power could increase the risk of an attack on Taiwan.</p> <p>Beijing has pledged to annex Taiwan under a disputed claim that it is a Chinese province, and in recent years has increased its military activity and other forms of harassment and coercion. No timeline has been set, but senior defence figures have said China could be capable of invasion as early as 2027. Others point to Xi's pledge of "national rejuvenation" by 2047 – the centenary of the People's Republic of China – as a potential goal.</p> <p>But with the events of last week's CCP congress, which consolidated power around Xi at levels not seen for decades, some are now questioning whether there is anyone left in the party who could stop him from making a rash move.</p> <p>The 20th party congress – the most important meeting of China's political cycle – ended with Xi's reappointment for a precedent-breaking third term, and a reshuffle of officials.</p> <p>The central committee, the politburo, the seven-member standing committee (PSC) and the Xi-led central military commission (CMC), which is in charge of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), are now dominated by loyalists and cleared of potential objectors and people from rival factions.</p> <p>Official reports and constitutional amendments also enshrined its hardening official stance towards Taiwan that had escalated as recently as August with the release of a white paper.</p> <p>Analysts and Taiwanese decision-makers are studying the changes to assess whether Xi's timeline for Taiwan is any shorter, or the same. After a week of watching the congress – an exercise sometimes compared to reading tea leaves – most agreed it definitely had not slowed.</p> <p>Prof Steve Tsang, the director of the Soas China Institute, said the changes made last week unquestionably increased the risk of China using force against Taiwan.</p> <p>There was already a low appetite for raising objections among the previous CCP leadership ranks, said Tsang, but "by replacing non-loyalists by proteges and loyalists in the party [including the PLA], Xi has made sure that no one will ever contradict him".</p> <p>"The risk of one man making a bad judgment and starting a war is always greater than a group of them doing so," he added.</p>

Among the new CMC appointments is Gen He Weidong, a rising star who has overseen the PLA's eastern command since 2019. He was reportedly an architect of the massive military drills staged after the speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, [visited Taiwan](#) in August. He, who was not even in the 200-member central committee at the last congress, is now the second-ranked official of the CMC.

The South China Morning Post also reported that other appointments, including Gen Zhang Youxia, and Adm Miao Hua, have similarly Taiwan-focused backgrounds.

Taiwan's defence minister, Chiu Kuo-cheng, said the CMC appointments suggested the CCP was "boosting its preparedness" for an invasion, Taiwanese media reported.

Victor Shih, an associate professor of political science at the University of California, said the new makeup of the PSC and CMC ensured Xi's orders would be implemented, "however extreme". "This may include a decision to invade Taiwan. Of course, preparing for something doesn't mean it will happen," Shih said.

Xi's continued commitment to "reunification" was first confirmed last week in his 104-minute opening speech, which made early and numerous references to Taiwan.

In the longer "work report", of which the speech was an excerpt, a key phrase defined reunification as a "requirement" for this promised "rejuvenation of the Chinese nation". Analysts had said the absence of such phrasing could have signalled a de-escalation.

The amendments to the CCP's guiding constitution also cemented Beijing's more aggressive stance on Taiwan. Where it previously listed Taiwan alongside Hong Kong and Macau as a place with which to "build solidarity", it now swore to "resolutely oppose and constrain Taiwan independence".

The propaganda apparatus played along. According to the Xinhua news agency, a Chinese state mouthpiece, when Xi declared the wheels of history were rolling towards reunification, the people of Taiwan "deeply felt the harmony and warmth" of his words.

Across the Taiwan Strait, the large and growing majority of Taiwan's 23.5 million population who oppose annexation beg to differ, but in Xi's China what the Taiwanese public wants is no real consideration.

Analysis by the International Crisis Group (ICG) noted that the Chinese work report made the particular point in blaming "foreign interference and Taiwan separatists" for the tensions, suggesting the CCP may be seeking to drive a wedge between the Taiwan's pro-independence majority and its pro-unification minority while resisting [international pushback](#).

"By emphasising that it maintains the option to use military force specifically to deter foreign and independence-seeking forces, Beijing may be trying to limit backlash among Taiwanese who have reacted negatively to its shows of military force in Taiwan's air defence identification zone and in the middle of the Taiwan Strait," the thinktank said.

Drew Thompson, a visiting senior research fellow at the National University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew school of public policy and a former US state department official, said the political dynamic in Beijing had changed as Xi was "without rivals, a designated successor or moderating voices" to act as a check on his impulses.

But knowing the Chinese president's innermost thoughts and plans is a near impossible task. "We can ask endless questions why Xi and the party make particular decisions, but we can't definitively answer any of them," Thompson said, noting that even Beijing insiders were left guessing as to the final makeup of the PSC until Sunday.

	<p>Bonnie Glaser, a China expert at the US-based German Marshall Fund thinktank, warned against speculation, saying she saw no evidence of “increased urgency” in the congress work report. “I think the risks are growing, but I believe that Xi is mindful of the potentially high costs of an attempted military takeover of Taiwan and he likely knows the PLA is not ready,” she said.</p> <p>Amanda Hsiao, an ICG analyst and co-author of the thinktank’s report, said things may become clearer when the current head of China’s Taiwan affairs office – who was removed from the central committee – is replaced.</p> <p>But she said it was clear from the work report and the August white paper that there was “a lot of continuity in the basic principles that have undergirded China’s approach to Taiwan”.</p> <p>“China will likely stepping up pressures on Taiwan in the coming years and will more or less follow the playbook they’ve been employing in the last couple of years,” she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 US, Saudi relations buckle under animosity
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-saudi-relations-biden-mbs-animosity-11666623661?mod=hp_lead_pos5
GIST	<p>RIYADH, Saudi Arabia—An unwritten pact binding the U.S. and Saudi Arabia has survived 15 presidents and seven kings through an Arab oil embargo, two Persian Gulf wars and the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Now, it is fracturing under two leaders who don’t like or trust each other.</p> <p>Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom’s 37-year-old day-to-day ruler, mocks President Biden in private, making fun of the 79-year-old’s gaffes and questioning his mental acuity, according to people inside the Saudi government. He has told advisers he hasn’t been impressed with Mr. Biden since his days as vice president, and much preferred former President Donald Trump, the people said.</p> <p>Mr. Biden said on the campaign trail in 2020 that he saw “very little social redeeming value in the present government in Saudi Arabia.” He refused to talk to Prince Mohammed for over a year, and when they finally did meet in Jeddah in July, Saudi officials present felt that Mr. Biden didn’t want to be there, and was uninterested in the policy discussions, the people said. U.S. officials said Mr. Biden devoted significant time and energy in the meetings.</p> <p>Geopolitical and economic forces have been driving wedges into the relationship between America and Saudi Arabia for years. But the enmity between Mr. Biden and Prince Mohammed has deepened the tension, and it is likely to get only messier.</p> <p>“Rarely has the chain of broken expectations and perceived insults and humiliations been greater than they are now,” said Aaron David Miller, a veteran U.S. diplomat in the Middle East now at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “There’s almost no trust and absolutely no mutual respect.”</p> <p>The decision by Saudi-led OPEC+ to cut oil production—raising crude prices at a time of high inflation just before an American election and despite U.S. pleas to hold off—has cemented both leaders’ resolve to reconsider a strategic relationship that has underpinned the global economy and Middle East geopolitics for almost 80 years, with once-unthinkable retaliatory measures now on the table. The White House has said Mr. Biden wants to review whether the Saudi relationship is serving U.S. national security interests, on top of an administration reassessment last year. Saudi officials say it may now be time for them to reassess the U.S. relationship, too.</p> <p>The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the West’s response have exacerbated tensions, since the production cut propped up oil prices that help fund President Vladimir Putin’s war effort and undermined U.S.-led sanctions on Moscow.</p>

In the Biden administration's view, the Ukraine war is a decisive historical moment that requires countries to choose a side, with the OPEC+ cut putting the Saudis closer to the Russians. The Saudis see an opportunity to assert their own interests in a world where the U.S. isn't the undisputed superpower, saying they can support Ukraine and work with Russia in OPEC+ at the same time.

Saudi officials say they are frustrated the relationship is still viewed through the narrow lens of oil and security. Riyadh has framed the recent OPEC+ decision as vital to its core national interests, a technical decision that they say was needed to prevent a precipitous drop in crude prices. Prince Mohammed now sees high oil prices as perhaps his last shot to use the kingdom's natural resources to modernize the Saudi economy and build a post-oil future.

Saudi Arabia plans to highlight that effort this week in Riyadh, with its Future Investment Initiative conference. Organizers said they didn't invite U.S. officials, who have previously attended at the cabinet level, after the Biden administration weighed withdrawing from participating.

"Our economic agenda is critical to our survival. It's not just about energy and defense," the Saudi foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, said in an interview. "It may have been 50 years ago but that certainly is not the case today."

Prince Faisal denied that Prince Mohammed had privately derided Mr. Biden or told aides he was unimpressed by him and favored Mr. Trump.

"These allegations made by anonymous sources are entirely false," said Prince Faisal. "The kingdom's leaders have always held the utmost respect for U.S. presidents, based on the kingdom's belief in the importance of having a relationship based on mutual respect."

U.S. officials said Mr. Biden has pushed the relationship beyond oil by working to deepen ties between Saudi Arabia and Israel, two countries that drew closer under Mr. Trump and are aligned in their view of Iran as the region's biggest threat. Though Israel and Saudi Arabia have no formal diplomatic relations, they have been secretly expanding their security cooperation with White House help.

Adrienne Watson, spokeswoman for the White House National Security Council, said Mr. Biden "has engaged with leaders from across the region" to establish "a more stable and integrated Middle East."

The path ahead is likely to be rocky. At risk for Washington are counterterrorism operations, efforts to contain Iran and Israel's deeper integration into the region. For the Saudis, a breakdown with the U.S. would jeopardize its national security and ambitious economic reforms. Mutual trade and investment worth hundreds of billions of dollars are also on the line.

The next big test comes in early December, when three events with major significance for global energy markets are set to collide: another OPEC+ meeting and plans by the European Union for an embargo of Russian oil and by the Group of Seven wealthy nations to cap the price of Russian crude.

The Saudis have signaled that they could raise oil production in December if the market loses Russian oil because of the EU embargo or the G-7 price cap, according to people inside the Saudi government. U.S. officials, skeptical that Riyadh would or could do that, say this will be a key litmus test for where the kingdom stands: with Ukraine and its Western backers or with Russia.

Mr. Biden and Prince Mohammed tried to build a personal rapport during the president's trip to Jeddah in July, where they fist-bumped ahead of a three-hour meeting. But the president angered the royal by immediately raising human-rights allegations, people close to the talks said, including the 2018 death of Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist based in Washington who was killed and dismembered by a team of Saudi agents inside the kingdom's Istanbul consulate.

The killing of Mr. Khashoggi, who was a Washington Post columnist, remains the most important flashpoint between the two men. Among Mr. Biden's first acts as president was releasing an American

intelligence report concluding that the crown prince had ordered the operation to capture or kill Mr. Khashoggi, an allegation the Saudi government denies.

The disagreement reflects Prince Mohammed's sense that it is unacceptable to keep raising the killing and Mr. Biden's sense that U.S. values demand it not be glossed over, said Jon Alterman, director of the Middle East program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank.

"The American bet is that the Saudis need the United States and will come around, and the Saudi bet is the opposite," Mr. Alterman said. The White House has ignored the personal nature of U.S.-Saudi ties, he added, either because it can't figure out how to deal with Prince Mohammed or it doesn't want to.

In the past, Saudi kings and American presidents were able to smooth out turbulent periods with strong personal relations. In 2005, just a few years after 15 Saudis participated in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush had hosted Crown Prince Abdullah at his Texas ranch, where the two men were photographed holding hands.

In the early 1970s, the Saudis partially nationalized American oil interests in the kingdom and launched an oil embargo that ushered in crippling inflation. Yet President Richard Nixon met King Faisal and toasted his wisdom during a state dinner in Jeddah in 1974.

"When you're dealing with a country that's basically run by five people, it has to be on a personal level," said Steven Cook, a Middle East expert at the Council on Foreign Relations, a New York-based think tank.

Since the 1940s, Washington's relationship with this insular dynastic monarchy grew around an implicit understanding that the U.S. would ensure Saudi Arabia's territorial integrity and the Muslim kingdom would keep oil flowing to a global economy dominated by America.

Those calculations have changed over time. The Saudis once sold the U.S. over 2 million barrels of oil every day, but that's fallen to less than 500,000 barrels a day, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. The U.S. grew to become the world's biggest oil producer, and China is now the biggest buyer of Saudi oil, followed by India.

After decades of war, Washington has sought to reduce entanglements in the Middle East to focus on a rising China and resurgent Russia. The main American initiative in the region—the Obama-era nuclear-containment deal with Iran—has also strained relations with Saudi Arabia, which opposes lifting sanctions unless Tehran also reins in its support for regional militias and the proliferation of ballistic missiles that threaten Riyadh. The Saudis were irked by the Obama administration negotiating with their archenemy about vital national security issues without consulting them.

"Oil-for-security is dead," said Ayham Kamel, head of Middle East and North Africa at political-risk advisory firm Eurasia Group. "The two sides seem to be having a problem accepting that that old deal is over, with Riyadh focused on security and Washington focused on oil."

When Mr. Biden was elected, Prince Mohammed huddled with advisers at a seaside palace to complete a plan to woo the new president, according to people familiar with the matter.

The Saudis delivered a few concessions on a topic Mr. Biden had campaigned on—human rights—including the eventual release of Loujain al-Hathloul, a prominent women's-rights campaigner who says she was tortured in detention, and two Saudi-American prisoners. And they quickly patched up a feud with neighboring Qatar after leading an economic boycott against it which Mr. Trump had initially supported.

Mr. Biden's response shocked Prince Mohammed, the people said. In his first weeks in office, the president froze Saudi arms sales, reversed a last-minute Trump administration decision to label Yemen's Houthi rebels a foreign terrorist organization, and published the intelligence report on Mr. Khashoggi's killing which Mr. Trump had previously dismissed.

For the Biden administration, these steps were a necessary correction. To the Saudis, Mr. Biden's early moves were a slap in the face.

"The interactions with the Biden administration were so bad for the first two years that one visit was insufficient to propel Saudi to walk away from" its oil alliance with Moscow, said David Schenker, a senior State Department official under the Trump administration and now a fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a think tank.

In a relationship that has historically been steered by presidents and kings themselves, the White House handed the Saudi file to Brett McGurk of the National Security Council and Amos Hochstein at the State Department, who, despite extensive diplomatic experience, carry little of the clout or policy mandate of officials who handled the relationship in previous administrations.

The pair communicated mainly with two of Prince Mohammed's brothers: Prince Abdulaziz, the oil minister, and Prince Khalid bin Salman, who was recently elevated to defense minister. The two Americans lobbied hard inside the administration for engagement with the Saudis, and when the Saudis bucked the U.S. on oil production over the summer, Mr. Hochstein sent Prince Abdulaziz a note suggesting he felt betrayed, The Wall Street Journal has reported.

The White House is wary of blowing up the relationship, which could jeopardize sensitive security operations. Mr. Sullivan said the president would consult with members of both parties—some of whom are vowing dramatic action—about how to respond to Saudi Arabia, including potential changes to U.S. security assistance, when Congress reconvenes after the midterm elections next month.

"The president isn't going to act precipitously," Mr. Sullivan told CNN.

The Saudis know they cannot replace the U.S. as a security partner overnight. Shortly after the meeting in Vienna, Saudi officials met with think tanks and lower-level U.S. officials to make their case. They said Washington has underestimated how much Saudi Arabia has helped Ukraine and they were surprised by the American reaction to the OPEC+ decision, meeting attendees said.

One drastic option on the table: Saudi officials have said privately that the kingdom could sell the U.S. Treasury bonds it holds if Congress were to pass anti-OPEC legislation, according to people familiar with the matter. Saudi holdings of U.S. Treasuries increased to \$119.2 billion in June from \$114.7 billion in May, according to U.S. Treasury data. Saudi Arabia is the 16th largest holder of U.S. Treasuries, according to federal data.

"It's hard to imagine either side saying 'All right, let's put this back together,' " said Mr. Cook of the Council on Foreign Relations.

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HEADLINE	10/24 NATO allies warn Russia against dirty bomb
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/nato-allies-warn-russia-against-dirty-bomb-plot-in-ukraine-11666622124?mod=hp_lead_pos6
GIST	<p>Senior U.S. officials said Monday they saw no evidence Russia was preparing to deploy a so-called dirty bomb in Ukraine, but threatened consequences if Russia did so after Moscow falsely accused Kyiv of preparing one.</p> <p>The remarks came a day after an unusual round of telephone calls between Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and his U.S., French, U.K. and Turkish counterparts.</p> <p>Mr. Shoigu told them that the war in Ukraine was moving toward a more dangerous phase and that Kyiv might soon deploy a dirty bomb, which combines conventional explosives with radioactive materials such as cesium or cobalt and would contaminate territory without immediately killing a large number of people.</p>

Western officials sought Monday to decipher Russia's motives in making the allegation, and dismissed it as absurd and false. Ukraine denied the allegation, and officials in the U.S. and Ukraine warned that Russia could be signaling that it is preparing [to use such weapons](#) itself in a false-flag operation and then use it as an excuse for [deploying a nuclear weapon](#).

"We have seen in the past that the Russians have, on occasion, blamed others for things that they were planning to do," National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communication John Kirby told reporters.

Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, discussed the claim with his Russian counterpart on Monday, U.S. defense officials said. Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, in their second conversation in two days, and reaffirmed U.S. support for Ukraine "in the face of continued Russian aggression, atrocities, and rhetoric surrounding so-called 'dirty bombs' in Ukraine," the State Department said.

Western experts said using a dirty bomb would make little sense for Ukraine. It would cause a relatively low level of destruction that wouldn't alter the shape of the conflict and would risk a far more devastating Russian nuclear response.

"A dirty bomb would be an ineffective battlefield weapon. Generally speaking, a dirty bomb is a crude device that seeks to spread radioactive contamination over a relatively small area of land—several small blocks," said Scott Roecker, vice president for nuclear materials security at the Nuclear Threat Initiative, a nonprofit global-security think tank. "A dirty bomb is more a psychological weapon than a weapon that would cause mass destruction. It wouldn't change the direction of the war," he said.

[Lacking an easy off-ramp](#) from the war, Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) has lately sought to buy time and undermine Western support for Ukraine by threatening apocalyptic escalation and [mobilizing 300,000 Russian reservists](#), whom Moscow is now funneling to the front. [A Ukrainian counteroffensive](#) is threatening the Russian-held provincial capital of Kherson, which if taken would be Moscow's most serious territorial setback of the war.

Russia has since the beginning of its invasion made accusations against Kyiv that the U.S. and its allies have dismissed as Moscow's attempt to deflect attention from its own brutality.

Those include allegations that Ukraine [is trying to acquire nuclear warheads](#), that it is preparing chemical weapons and that the U.S. and Kyiv have been operating a network of bioweapon laboratories in Ukraine, with the personal assistance of President Biden and investments from his son Hunter Biden and investor George Soros.

Western officials say that the Russian signaling Sunday was ominous because it was phoned in by Russia's defense minister, who has seldom engaged with the U.S. or other allies. Before Sunday, Mr. Shoigu [had only spoken twice](#) to his U.S. counterpart, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, since the beginning of the war. The call between Mr. Austin and his defense counterpart was arranged Saturday, a U.S. official said.

In their response to Mr. Shoigu, Western defense ministers appeared to take seriously the threat of an escalation in Ukraine, including use of nuclear materials, said Andrew Weiss, vice president at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington. "Policy makers also have an uncomfortable question," he said. "Is it simply another Russian ruse or is Russia foreshadowing something that previously seemed unthinkable?"

Mr. Shoigu's calls sparked a flurry of trans-Atlantic consultations. After speaking with Mr. Shoigu on Sunday, Mr. Austin called Ben Wallace, the U.K. secretary of state for defense.

	<p>Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said Monday that he had spoken with the head of the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael Grossi, and the agency had agreed to send experts to sites in Ukraine which Russia "deceitfully claims to be developing a dirty bomb."</p> <p>"We have nothing to hide," Mr. Kuleba said on Twitter.</p> <p>An IAEA spokesman said Mr. Kuleba had invited inspectors to Ukraine to examine the Russian claims and that the agency would announce its plans soon. As part of its core global-safeguards work, the agency already reviews the risk of nuclear material being diverted for military purposes in Ukraine. Mr. Grossi was scheduled to meet Mr. Blinken in Washington on Monday in Washington.</p> <p>Mr. Shoigu's allegations aren't the first time Russia has claimed Ukraine is working on nuclear material to be potentially used in the war. In the first days of the conflict, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov alleged that Kyiv had embarked on plans to acquire its own nuclear weapons and claimed that Ukraine still had old Soviet technologies and the means to deliver the weapons.</p> <p>Mr. Lavrov's claims were dismissed days later by Mr. Grossi of the IAEA, who said there was no evidence that would raise questions about Ukraine's "nonproliferation credentials."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 Spokane sheriff timeline for homeless camp
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/homeless/spokane-county-sheriff-emergency-operations-center-i-90-camp-clearing/293-e2001bf4-524b-441d-af47-e73ea54a01e7
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — Sheriff Ozzie Knezovich is moving forward with plans to remove people and their belongings off the Department of Transportation's property, and on Tuesday, set up an emergency operations center.</p> <p>The center will be a place for service providers and officials to meet as they work toward the common goal of getting people into shelters before the cold weather sets in.</p> <p>"I can tell you within four weeks, I want this done," Knezovich said.</p> <p>The sheriff says there are plans to build an extra 100 beds at the Trent shelter and Catholic Charities is expected to open the former Quality Inn by Dec. 1 with room for 100 homeless men and women.</p> <p>"If we do need that extra 100 beds, it may take us another two weeks," Knezovich said. "We'll see. We're playing that out."</p> <p>Jewels Helping Hands has called the sheriff's timeline unrealistic, claiming there are not enough low-barrier shelter beds available. They've also criticized the sheriff, pointing out that he's never been to the camp.</p> <p>"But, I am going to go to the camp," Knezovich said. "What are you going to show me that I don't already know?"</p> <p>Knezovich says he's had very productive meetings with the city, county and service providers, but conversations with the state have stalled.</p> <p>On Monday, WSDOT said the sheriff's emergency operations center is not needed, saying the state is already implementing all of the county's proposed actions. WSDOT says they have been working to close the camp since spring.</p> <p>WSDOT released the following statement: <i>"WSDOT, Commerce and WSP – the three state agencies partnering on the state Right of Way Safety Initiative for homeless encampments – are aware of Spokane County's announcement that it will open an</i></p>

Emergency Operations Center to address Camp Hope. We remain focused on our work to transition residents and close this site and we cannot join in their efforts. As county leaders are well aware, our state agencies – along with local partners – have been proactively working to close Camp Hope since this spring and have been sharing regular updates on the progress. Simply put, an EOC is duplicative and not needed because we're already implementing all of the county's proposed actions. State and local partners already have bi-weekly operations meetings about next steps to close the encampment. We have repeatedly asked local government to proactively partner with us on this important work, but have instead been met with legal proceedings, arbitrary deadlines and misinformation. In addition, given the legal action the county chose to bring against WSDOT regarding Camp Hope, we are not able to partner with the very entities bringing those legal proceedings – the county and the sheriff – until court proceedings are dismissed."

"You could have had this camp empty if you were truly working on this since April," Knezovich said.

The sheriff says the state is refusing to come to the table. WSDOT claims it's the other way around.

"Come together and solve an issue within weeks rather than a year and why can't we drop the luggage, act like adults, work together for this community?," Knezovich said. "That's my question to the state. Why do you keep throwing red herrings? Is it the fact that you just want this to continue? If that's the case, shame on you all, we'll do it on our own."

Spokane city and county officials will meet at City Hall Tuesday to provide an update on the camp, along with addressing growing concerns from neighbors. Mayor Nadine Woodward, Mary Kuney and Sheriff Ozzie Knezovich are among the anticipated speakers.

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HEADLINE	10/24 Russians retreat, Ukraine finds devastation
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/24/world/europe/ukraine-devastation-russian-retreat.html
GIST	<p>KAMIANKA, Ukraine — Little moved in the village of Kamianka, except for a cat bolting from under the rubble of a destroyed house and metal roofing banging in the wind.</p> <p>Serhii, a livestock farmer, sat slumped beside the burned ruins of his home.</p> <p>"I came here in case I could find anything and to clear up a bit," he said. "But there is nothing," he said, gesturing with a sweep of his arm at the wreckage.</p> <p>The scale of the destruction is staggering across hundreds of towns and villages recently vacated by Russian troops in the Kharkiv region of eastern Ukraine. The few residents who have traveled back into the war zone to check on their property, like Serhii and his wife, Iryna, often stand speechless with dismay before the devastation.</p> <p>Throughout Ukraine, the war had destroyed or damaged about 120,000 houses and 16,000 apartment buildings by the end of September, according to the Kyiv School of Economics, which estimated overall physical damage at \$127 billion. The World Bank, European Union and Ukrainian government have estimated recovery costs at about \$350 billion.</p> <p>For months Kamianka, which lies on a main highway, marked the front line between Russian and Ukrainian forces, and not a single building in the village escaped damage. Russian troops retreated last month in the face of a Ukrainian counteroffensive, leaving the village littered with unused Russian shells and mines, its wooden church burned to the ground, its school with gaping holes in its walls.</p> <p>Ukrainian emergency services had just collected the remains of two civilians — Serhii's neighbor, who was killed in a shell blast in March, and another man crushed in his car by a Russian tank on the main road around the same time. The Russian troops who had occupied the village since April had not bothered to bury the dead Ukrainians, Serhii said.</p>

A neighbor, Oleksandr, 66, stopped by in his car and said there was another civilian lying dead in a cellar at the end of the village. Ukrainian engineers had not cleared mines from the village so no one could retrieve the body yet, he added.

For the Ukrainian authorities coming in to pick up the pieces and restore the local government, the task is both immense and still dangerous. Ukrainian troops and civilians have suffered casualties from mines, and Russian jets and artillery continue to bombard towns after withdrawing from them.

Russian S-300 missiles struck the town of Kupiansk, an important transport hub, repeatedly after Ukrainian troops recaptured it in late September. Three missiles hit a line of houses on the edge of Kupiansk earlier this month, Oct. 10, demolishing two homes and gouging yards-wide craters in a garden and the street.

“It was a huge explosion of tearing metal,” said Elena, 63, a disabled woman whose house burned down. She escaped, leading her neighbor, Anna, who is 87 and blind, down the stairs to take shelter in a barn.

“We lost everything, all our furniture, all our clothes, everything we owned,” she said.

The missiles may have been aimed at Ukrainian troops who had lodged briefly in the house next door, but the result has been to punish the civilian population and new administration.

The newly appointed mayor of Kupiansk, Andriy Besedin, 39, said the attacks were Russian forces taking revenge after being forced to cede a vast swath of territory.

“The calculation of the enemy is beyond common sense,” he said. “What they cannot take, they simply destroy.”

But he said the strikes were also part of a countrywide campaign by Moscow to target energy supplies and civilian life, to undermine the Ukrainian government and test support for the war.

“They shell the civilian population, destroy private houses, so people have nowhere to live, and you have to solve these issues — it is very difficult.”

Ukrainian officials are in a hurry, acutely conscious of the need to bring vital services to destroyed areas where people have been surviving with little food, medical help, water, gas or electricity.

They are also dealing with a sometimes hostile population that for six months was fed pro-Russian propaganda that incessantly blamed Ukraine for the artillery fire and hardship they have suffered.

In the town of Staryi Saltiv, women were ladling out soup into containers for a line of townspeople as other volunteers ran a generator for people to charge their cellphones. The town has been without electricity or running water since April, with no sign of a return of services yet, said Lyudmyla, 52.

She worked as a nurse at the local high school before the war, and started the soup kitchen on her return to the town a few weeks ago because she said people were hungry. The town was cut off by the fighting for months, she said, and residents had only survived thanks to their habit of self-sufficiency and keeping stores of food in their cellars.

“Some people had chickens and rabbits,” she added. “People were sharing a lot.”

But even if the roads had opened and food assistance was starting to arrive, she said she feared people could not survive the winter without utilities, in particular residents of the high-rise apartment buildings on the edge of town.

Officials across the region almost universally answered with one word to describe their greatest challenge: “Winter.”

In the city of Iziium, where 18,000 residents lived through the Russian occupation and the fighting, the administration has managed to reconnect electricity and water in most neighborhoods, the mayor, Valerii Marchenko, said.

He warned people that the government would be able to repair the central heating for only one-third of the city’s apartment complexes. Yet most residents, many of them seniors who had stayed throughout the war, were still refusing to leave, he said.

“They understand they will not have heating,” Mr. Marchenko said. “But they do not want to evacuate even though we are offering the opportunity.”

The city was working on a solution to install wood stoves or electric heaters so residents could at least heat one room in their apartments, he said. “It’s the only possibility because they do not want to leave.”

There is a hardness verging on obstinacy on display among residents who have survived the war sheltering in their basements and cellars.

“The mood is good,” said Yegor, 16, gulping down his lunch from a soup kitchen.

“There’s no shelling — electricity and gas are back on,” he said. “All we need is the internet.”

He and his friend Denys, 15, were going around town using temporary internet hubs provided by volunteers and as they were passing had joined the lunch line on a side street.

A few blocks away a group of neighbors sat chatting on benches in the courtyard of their apartment beside a collection of makeshift wood stoves made out of rusty buckets and small grills. It was only the third day, after six months, that they did not have to cook on the outdoor stoves, thanks to the restoration of electricity, one of the women, Svetlana, said happily.

“For two months we did not have a crumb,” said her neighbor, Lyudmyla, who was wrapped up in a fur-trimmed coat and gloves. Russian soldiers gave them bread and rations twice a week, otherwise they would not have survived, she said.

A retired teacher, Lyudmyla, did not criticize Russia but reserved her greatest complaints for the Ukrainian mayor and his officials who she said had evacuated the city in March and left the remaining residents without recourse.

“Why is the mayor who betrayed us allowed back?” she asked. “He fled and left us with nothing.”

The mayor, Mr. Marchenko, said he was well aware of the complaints.

“Many people have not recovered from the Russian agitation,” he said. “The Russians were saying that Ukraine abandoned you and the government ran away and did not provide you with any help when in fact it was the Russians who did not allow a humanitarian corridor.”

The solution, he said, was to deliver services to the people faster and better than the Russians had. “All we can do is show that Ukraine is better.”

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HEADLINE	10/24 Russian occupation officials flee Kherson
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/24/world/europe/russia-ukraine-kherson-war.html

KYIV, Ukraine — The first city to fall to Russia's invasion of Ukraine was in turmoil on Monday as its Moscow-appointed officials began fleeing across a river to safer territory, while Russian soldiers appeared to be digging in for a fight against advancing Ukrainian forces.

Government offices in Kherson have been emptied of essential equipment. Civilians have been told by proxy officials loyal to the Kremlin to take "documents, money, valuables and clothes" and evacuate, according to Ukrainian officials, videos on social media and accounts from Ukrainian activists who have spoken to residents.

And months after residents began complying with Moscow's demands that they adopt a new currency, some merchants in Kherson had a new message for customers: No more rubles.

Within a week of invading Ukraine on Feb. 24, the Russian military had the city of Kherson, in the south, firmly in hand. And late last month, the Kremlin went even further, announcing that it had annexed the entire Kherson region and three others, even as its forces were losing ground there. President Vladimir V. Putin said they were now part of "Mother Russia," a claim rejected by most world leaders.

Billboards around the city still declare that "Kherson is forever with Russia," but the gap between grand pronouncement and reality on the ground is stark.

With internet and other communication services in Kherson almost completely severed, it was difficult on Monday to know exactly what was happening in the city. But the reports that seeped out added to the evidence that Russia's civilian administration there was proceeding with plans to abandon its headquarters as Ukrainian forces continued to make hard-fought gains in their southern offensive.

Russian military forces, however, despite earlier reports that their leaders had sought permission to reposition to the east bank of the Dnipro River, appeared to be staying put.

"They are not preparing to exit now," Gen. Kyrylo O. Budanov, the head of Ukraine's military intelligence service, said in an interview with a Ukrainian news outlet, Ukrainska Pravda, that was published on Monday. "They are preparing to defend."

The evacuation orders for civilians, he said, suggested that Moscow could be readying the city for urban combat.

"They are creating the illusion that everything has gone," General Budanov said. "At the same time, on the contrary, they are bringing in new military units there and preparing the streets of the city for defense."

The loss of Kherson would be a severe military and symbolic blow for Mr. Putin, who has [rejected requests from his commanders](#) on the ground that they be allowed to retreat from the city. Located on the west bank of the Dnipro River, Kherson is a gateway to both Russian-held Crimea in the south and Ukraine's Black Sea ports to the west, including Odesa.

Over the weekend, local leaders loyal to the Kremlin said that "all departments and ministries of civil administration" must be moved across the Dnipro. Occupation officials also said they would relocate as many as 60,000 civilians.

Moscow claims that as many as 20,000 people have fled, but Ukrainian officials put the figure at closer to 1,000 and say that most are pro-Kremlin collaborators.

Serhii Khlan, the exiled deputy governor of the Kherson region, said Moscow's forces and local proxies were engaged in "intense pillaging," stealing "everything with archaeological and historical significance." While his claims could not be independently verified, looting by Russian forces in other parts of the country has been widely documented.

Kyiv has imposed a blackout on detailed information about its southern offensive, but the Ukrainian military's southern command said Monday that since it launched its counteroffensive at the end of August, its forces have retaken 90 towns and villages where more than 12,000 people were still living.

The military campaign has been aided by weaponry provided by the United States and other Western countries, increasing tensions with Moscow.

On Monday, the most senior military commanders for both the United States and Russia spoke by telephone, continuing a flurry of high-level talks between Moscow and NATO allies as Russia continued to fan fears of nuclear escalation in Ukraine. Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, spoke with his Russian counterpart, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, the chief of the Russian General Staff, Pentagon officials said.

"The military leaders discussed several security-related issues of concern and agreed to keep the lines of communication open," General Milley's spokesman, Col. Dave Butler, said in an emailed statement.

In recent days, Western officials have been concerned by Russian unsubstantiated claims that Ukraine is planning to use a so-called dirty bomb on its own territory. A dirty bomb uses conventional explosives to spread radioactive material.

Over the weekend, the top diplomats in France, Britain and the United States, three of Ukraine's strongest allies, issued a rare joint statement that rejected the claim, calling it a pretext Moscow has concocted for escalating the war.

In the statement, the three governments confirmed that their defense ministers had each spoken with their Russian counterpart, Sergei K. Shoigu, and rejected "Russia's transparently false allegations."

Russia has not publicly offered evidence to back up the dirty bomb accusations, and Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, called them "lies."

Russian officials were vilifying Ukrainians and their leaders even before the invasion, presumably to lay the groundwork for public support, but on Monday it appeared that even in Russia there are limits.

On Monday, a Russian talk show host apologized after he was suspended by a state broadcaster viewed by many as a mouthpiece for the Kremlin, for suggesting that Ukrainian children should be drowned or burned in their homes.

"I apologize to everyone who was stunned by this," said the host, Anton Krasovsky, a director of broadcasting for RT.

"It was just tasteless," Mr. Krasovsky said in two statements posted to Telegram, calling the comments he made last week "wild and unthinkable."

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HEADLINE	10/24 Historic milestone new UK prime minister
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/24/world/europe/rishi-sunak-uk-prime-minister.html
GIST	<p>LONDON — Rishi Sunak prevailed in a chaotic three-day race for leader of Britain's Conservative Party on Monday, a remarkable political comeback that doubled as a historical milestone, making him the first person of color to become prime minister in British history.</p> <p>The 42-year-old son of Indian immigrants, whose political career has already had its ups and downs, Mr. Sunak won the contest to replace the short-lived prime minister, Liz Truss, when his only remaining opponent, Penny Mordaunt, withdrew after failing to reach the threshold of 100 nominating votes from Conservative lawmakers.</p>

Mr. Sunak, a former chancellor of the Exchequer, is expected to pull Britain back to more mainstream policies after Ms. Truss's failed experiment in trickle-down economics, which rattled financial markets and badly damaged Britain's fiscal reputation. He is also likely to offer a stark contrast to the flamboyant style and erratic behavior of Boris Johnson, his former boss and Ms. Truss's discredited predecessor.

But Mr. Sunak will confront the gravest economic crisis in Britain in a generation, and he will do so at the helm of a badly fractured Conservative Party. Healing the rifts in the party, and leading the country through the economic crosswinds of the months to come, will require political skills at least as adroit as those that enabled Mr. Sunak to navigate the leadership contest.

Mr. Johnson's decision to pull out of the race on Sunday night cleared a path for Mr. Sunak, who had challenged Ms. Truss last summer but lost to her in a vote of the party's rank-and-file members. With Mr. Sunak the only surviving candidate this time, he was not subject to another vote of the members.

It was a head-spinning reversal of fortune for Mr. Sunak, whose abrupt resignation from Mr. Johnson's cabinet last July set in motion Mr. Johnson's downfall and pitched Britain into upheaval, culminating in Ms. Truss's brief, calamitous stint. After he lost the leadership contest to her, it seemed as if Mr. Sunak's meteoric ascent had cratered as well.

Now, he will become Britain's third prime minister in seven weeks, the youngest in two centuries and the first person of the Hindu faith to achieve its highest elected office.

A former investment banker whose wife is the daughter of an Indian technology billionaire, Mr. Sunak will also be one of the wealthiest people ever to occupy 10 Downing Street — something that could prove a vulnerability at a time when Britons are struggling to pay soaring gas bills. The Times of London this year [estimated the couple's worth](#) at more than \$800 million, placing them among the 250 wealthiest British people or families.

But if his victory swept away another barrier in British politics — putting Mr. Sunak in the same pathbreaking category as Margaret Thatcher, Britain's first female prime minister, and Benjamin Disraeli, its only prime minister of Jewish heritage — it also thrust him into power at a singularly difficult moment.

"There is no doubt we face profound economic challenges," Mr. Sunak said in brief, somewhat stiff, remarks after his victory. "We now need stability and unity, and I will make it my utmost priority to bring my party and country together."

Britain is suffering the twin scourges of surging energy prices and a recession, as well as the self-inflicted damage of Ms. Truss's free-market agenda: sweeping unfunded tax cuts that frightened markets, sent the pound into a tailspin and kicked off a rebellion of her own lawmakers.

The dramatic circumstances of Mr. Sunak's rise reinforced the problems he will face in uniting a divided party. Had Ms. Mordaunt cobbled together the necessary 100 votes from lawmakers, polls suggested she would have stood a decent chance of beating him with the members, as Ms. Truss did.

Her failed challenge and Mr. Johnson's aborted bid laid bare a party still torn by factions. Some members continue to view Mr. Sunak as Mr. Johnson's political assassin, and the serial scandals of Mr. Johnson's tenure, followed by the economic misfire of Ms. Truss's, have left the popularity of the Tories in tatters.

The party now lags the opposition Labour Party by more than 30 percentage points in some opinion polls. The Labour leader, Keir Starmer, has demanded a general election, and those calls could grow louder as the new prime minister imposes a belt-tightening economic program in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis.

Still, political analysts said the party's swift conclusion to the leadership contest, which avoided a vote by the members, suggested that for now, the feuding Tory factions were committed to rallying around Mr. Sunak. In her withdrawal statement, Ms. Mordaunt called for people to back her rival.

“After the trauma of the last four or five months, even factions that do not support Sunak are going to give him a fair wind,” said Tony Travers, a professor of politics at the London School of Economics. “They have to decide whether they want to win another election or spend a period out of government fighting with each other.”

British assets and the pound jumped after news of Mr. Sunak’s victory, raising hopes that his fiscal prudence and more technocratic style of governing would settle investors after the turbulence set off by Ms. Truss.

As a candidate, Mr. Sunak warned that her plan to reduce taxes at a time of double-digit inflation would be destabilizing. He called for keeping in place an increase in corporate taxes and holding off on a cut in income tax, both of which Mr. Sunak had proposed while chancellor. “Borrowing your way out of inflation isn’t a plan,” he said at a debate in July, “it’s a fairy-tale.”

Mr. Sunak said almost nothing about his plans during this more compressed race. But he is expected to hew to the agenda he laid out during the campaign last summer, which emphasized the need to curb inflation before reducing taxes. With Britain’s borrowing having risen as a result of Ms. Truss’s policies, he may be forced into deeper spending cuts than he once expected.

Some analysts expect him to retain Jeremy Hunt, the chancellor whom Ms. Truss recruited after she was forced to eject her first, Kwasi Kwarteng, the architect of the market-destabilizing tax cuts. Mr. Hunt reversed virtually all of Ms. Truss’s tax cuts, embracing ideas similar to Mr. Sunak’s.

“The pressure on him is to run the most stable, responsible, efficient government as is humanly possible,” Professor Travers said. “How the financial markets are going to respond is going to be major check on this government.”

The man chosen to face all these challenges was born in Southampton, on England’s south coast, to Indian immigrants who had moved to Britain from East Africa. His father was a family doctor; his mother ran a pharmacy. They saved to send him to Winchester College, one of Britain’s most academically rigorous high schools, and then to Oxford University, where he studied philosophy, politics and economics.

From there, Mr. Sunak worked at Goldman Sachs and at a hedge fund, and later earned an M.B.A. at Stanford University, where he met his wife, Akshata Murty. Her father is Narayana Murthy, the founder of Infosys, whose wealth Forbes magazine estimates at \$4.5 billion.

Mr. Sunak entered Parliament in 2015, rising quickly to become chancellor in 2020, where he won instant popularity by handing out billions of pounds to protect those who lost jobs in the coronavirus pandemic.

But his career was nearly derailed by reports that Ms. Murty held a privileged tax status that allowed her to avoid paying millions of dollars in British taxes on some of her income. It also emerged that he had retained a U.S. green card, which would allow him to settle permanently in the United States.

Mr. Sunak gave up his green card and Ms. Murty changed her tax status, but the damage was done. Though he survived the episode, it left him with lingering vulnerability at a time of economic hardship for million of Britons.

Critics often tar him as a jet-setter, out of touch with the lives of ordinary people. It doesn’t help that he and Ms. Murty own expensive houses in London, in his parliamentary district in Yorkshire and in Santa Monica, Calif. Or that he works out on a Peloton exercise machine and has been photographed wearing \$500 Prada suede loafers and using a \$200 “smart” mug that keeps coffee at a precise temperature.

“It will hinge on what people see him doing,” said Anand Menon, a professor of European politics at Kings College London. “He will be vulnerable if he is seen as defending the privileged and the rich.”

	<p>Professor Menon said Mr. Sunak’s race was less of a factor in Britain than it would be for a comparable political figure in the United States. For one, he was elected by Conservative lawmakers rather than in a popular vote. While critics speculated that his Indian heritage might have hurt him with some party members last summer, his wealth was viewed as the bigger issue.</p> <p>“It’s not like we’re living in some kind of post-racial nirvana here,” Professor Menon said. “We just do it somewhat differently than in the United States.”</p> <p>On the streets of London, people reacted cautiously, perhaps reflecting weariness after months of turmoil in British politics.</p> <p>“They need someone regular in charge — someone who knows what it’s really like out here, rather than looking down from the 26th floor,” said Hazel Wallace, 26, who works in an ice-cream parlor and views the cost of living as the biggest issue. “It’s survival of the fittest right now, what with everything going up.”</p> <p>But David Smith, 69, a retired painter and decorator sipping a pint in the Bishop Blaize pub in Leyburn, said he was relieved that Mr. Sunak had replaced Ms. Truss. “He did warn the party that things wouldn’t be right with her, and nobody listened to him,” Mr. Smith said, adding that he expected Mr. Sunak to do “a fantastic job.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 Ethiopia govt., rebels agree to peace talks
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/24/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-peace-talks.html
GIST	<p>NAIROBI, Kenya — Representatives of the Ethiopian government and rebel forces in the country’s Tigray region arrived in South Africa on Monday for their first formal peace talks, a much-anticipated effort to resolve the almost two-year civil war that has ravaged Africa’s second-most-populous nation.</p> <p>The mediation, led by the African Union, has new urgency because the conflict in Tigray has intensified, raising fears that the humanitarian crisis and widespread atrocities that have left thousands dead, millions displaced and hundreds of thousands hungry will only get worse.</p> <p>The Ethiopian military and its Eritrean allies captured several major towns from Tigrayan forces in recent days, too, advancing toward the regional capital, Mekelle, and leaving Tigrayan leaders with a weaker hand in the delicate negotiations.</p> <p>The talks have taken months to organize and were scheduled to start earlier this month but ran into logistical and organizational challenges — including a high degree of mistrust on both sides. The negotiations are now set to begin on Tuesday after the mediators finalized the framework for the talks on Monday, according to a senior Western official with knowledge of the process.</p> <p>The formal talks have drawn the attention of global leaders, who have urged the warring parties to seek a political resolution that would halt the indiscriminate killings, shelling and human rights violations that have surged anew since a five-month humanitarian truce was shattered in August.</p> <p>“The situation in Ethiopia is spiraling out of control,” the United Nations secretary general, António Guterres, warned in a speech last week. “We need the urgent resumption of talks towards an effective, lasting political settlement.”</p> <p>The peacemaking efforts in South Africa are aimed at halting an interneccine conflict that began in November 2020, when the Ethiopian government, led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, a onetime rebel movement that had dominated the country’s politics for nearly three decades, began clashing in northern Ethiopia.</p>

A new wave of violence followed the breakdown in August of a five-month cease-fire: Government airstrikes and artillery bombardment have [killed civilians](#) and [aid workers](#), and a gush of hate speech and incitement to violence has [spread through social media](#).

The peace talks between the Ethiopian government and the Tigrayans are being steered by a three-person team of negotiators: the former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo; the former South African deputy president Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka; and Uhuru Kenyatta, who was until recently the president of Kenya. The African Union, which convened the meeting, and the South African government, which is hosting it, have not provided any details about the format of the talks, how long they will last or where they will take place.

Tigrayan officials have remained wary of Mr. Obasanjo, whom they have accused of favoring Mr. Abiy, and his presence contributed to the delay in bringing both sides together.

The United States ferried Tigrayan officials out of the war zone aboard a U.S. military aircraft over the weekend, said a United States official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss operational matters.

It was the latest of [several secretive flights organized by the State Department since March](#) that brought together representatives from both sides, as part of a wider international effort to kick-start formal peace talks. Mike Hammer, the U.S. envoy to the Horn of Africa region, convened a previous meeting in September at Camp Lemonnier, the American military base in Djibouti, that unsuccessfully sought to broker a cessation of hostilities.

On Sunday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he spoke with both President William Ruto of Kenya and the South African foreign minister, [Naledi Pandor](#), about the peace talks and how to ensure a successful outcome.

Tigrayan forces have said their pressing demands at the talks will be for an immediate cessation of hostilities, unhindered access to humanitarian aid and the withdrawal of Eritrean forces.

But their requests, along with the entire negotiation process, observers say, could be undermined by the escalating conflict and the [vow by the government to take control of all federal facilities](#), including airports, in the Tigray region.

Ethiopian and Eritrean forces have retaken major towns like Adwa and Shire in recent days, raising the prospect, experts say, of a quick advance toward the region's capital.

"Given their military momentum on the ground, the federal authorities may seek a surrender, with Tigray's leaders pledging to end their armed resistance and substantially demobilize their forces," said William Davison, the senior Ethiopia analyst at the International Crisis Group. "But Tigray's negotiators are highly unlikely to accept those sorts of terms as a way to end the fighting."

The conflict in northern Ethiopia is raging even as [ethnic massacres](#), internal fighting and disease outbreaks grip other parts of the country. The nation is also in the throes of its worst drought in decades, which has devastated crops, killed millions of livestock and left children malnourished.

Ahead of the peace talks scheduled in South Africa, several political and religious leaders urged the warring sides to lay down their weapons and allay the suffering of the Ethiopian people.

"I follow the persistent situation of conflict in Ethiopia with trepidation," Pope Francis [said in a tweet](#). "May the efforts of the parties for dialogue lead to a genuine path of reconciliation."

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HEADLINE	10/24 South Africa leader's anticorruption plan
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/24/world/africa/south-africa-corruption-ramaphosa.html

JOHANNESBURG — South Africa's president has introduced long-anticipated measures to tackle endemic corruption, subjecting even himself and his cabinet to closer scrutiny of their personal spending and lifestyles. But some analysts question whether reforms that would help the government regain the trust of a fed-up public will ever be carried out.

President Cyril Ramaphosa, speaking on national television Sunday evening, said that his government would, among other things, establish a permanent anticorruption unit in the national prosecutor's office, create transparency in the granting of public contracts and increase protections for whistle-blowers.

"As a country," he said, "we are emerging from a dark and difficult period."

But Mr. Ramaphosa deferred much of the work to root out corruption to Parliament and other government entities. He also did not say how he would tackle some of the most controversial issues closest to home, like what to do about senior officials within his government who have been accused of corruption.

"It's so unserious, it's almost a joke," William Gumede, a professor of public management at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, said of the president's proposals. If he wanted to show that he was serious about dealing with corruption in his orbit, Professor Gumede added, Mr. Ramaphosa should have suspended the ministers accused of corruption.

Mr. Ramaphosa's proposals came in response to hundreds of [recommendations by a judicial commission](#) that spent three years hearing evidence from more than 300 witnesses about how officials had gutted public enterprises to enrich themselves and their friends. The commission, led by South Africa's chief justice, Raymond Zondo, focused mostly on the nine years that Mr. Ramaphosa's predecessor, Jacob Zuma, led the country.

But the current president's reform efforts also come at a particularly fraught time, with [Mr. Ramaphosa facing his own corruption scandal](#).

As the country confronts a breakdown in public life, with frequent blackouts because of an overwhelmed electricity grid and increasing water outages, several investigations are underway into whether the president had [sought to cover up the theft](#) of potentially millions of dollars in cash from a game farm he owns.

During a news conference last week, Mr. Zuma said that Mr. Ramaphosa, his staunch foe, was corrupt, while another former president, Thabo Mbeki, questioned Mr. Ramaphosa's future as a leader amid the farm theft inquiry.

Mr. Ramaphosa also faces a serious challenge to his leadership of the African National Congress, or A.N.C., South Africa's liberation party, which has governed the country since democracy began in 1994. One of his cabinet ministers and a former minister are among the main contenders attempting to unseat him in the party's elective conference to be held in December.

At stake is the future of the A.N.C.: With many of its leaders implicated in corruption scandals, the party's electoral support has slid drastically in recent years. Many believe that it could fall below 50 percent of the national vote for the first time when elections are held next year.

Some observers say that Mr. Ramaphosa may be attempting to bolster public perception of his party by taking a bold stance on corruption, his hallmark issue since becoming the country's leader in 2018.

"It's very strategic for him to pay lip service to the whole issue of corruption," said Hlengiwe Ndlovu, a senior lecturer at the School of Governance at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Collette Schulz-Herzenberg, a political science professor at South Africa's Stellenbosch University, said that Mr. Ramaphosa was caught "between the devil and the deep blue sea."

Pushing hard against corruption, she said, could endear him to a public that is disenchanted with A.N.C. leaders. But it could also alienate him from officials in his own party who might be taken down by anticorruption efforts and who accuse him of using corruption as a cover to sideline political opponents.

Neither his party nor the country has “much faith in him right now for various reasons,” Dr. Schulz-Herzenberg said.

Mr. Ramaphosa came to power after the scandal-plagued Zuma years and was seen as someone who could right the ship, but much of the country seems to have lost confidence in his ability to make things right, she said. A survey released last year by Afrobarometer, an independent research network, found that about two-thirds of South Africans believed corruption had increased under Mr. Ramaphosa’s watch.

Among the loudest criticisms of Mr. Ramaphosa’s anticorruption plan is that he did not address a system used by the A.N.C. to appoint public-sector leaders, often leading to choices based on expedience rather than competence. The judicial commission found the practice unconstitutional.

Some analysts also raised skepticism about the establishment of an anticorruption unit in the prosecutor’s office. Such a unit was disbanded under Mr. Zuma. And analysts note that without proper funding, resources and room to operate independently, the new unit may find it hard to hold any perpetrators to account.

Susan Booysen, a political analyst who has written a book about Mr. Ramaphosa’s tenure, said the problem with many of the president’s proposals was that they took the long view.

“In South Africa,” she said, “it’s not enough anymore to give assurances that we are looking at things or we are attending to matters.”

Still, some political analysts say, the president has placed the anticorruption fight front and center, and that could lead to change despite any shortcomings in his agenda.

“We came from an era where we had a president who went out of his way to protect those that are corrupt,” said Ralph Mathekg, a Johannesburg-based political analyst. “I don’t think Ramaphosa’s going to protect anyone.”

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HEADLINE	10/24 West Bank Nablus flashpoint for violence
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/24/world/middleeast/israel-west-bank-nablus.html https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-west-bank-israel-nablus-9b5d5857b8933233b5598e51e032814b?utm_source=homepage&utm_medium=TopNews&utm_campaign=position_02
GIST	<p>RAMALLAH, West Bank — Three Palestinians were killed during a firefight with Israeli security forces who had entered a flash point city in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian officials said.</p> <p>One of the men who died was unarmed, according to Palestinian health and security officials, who said several Palestinian gunmen were also wounded.</p> <p>The violence erupted when Israeli security officers who had entered the town of Nablus were spotted by Palestinian security officers and militants, according to a spokesman for the Palestinian Fatah movement.</p> <p>The Israeli military said that its forces were operating in Nablus but gave no further details.</p> <p>Nablus has been a flash point for violence since Israel began a crackdown in the West Bank in March in response to a series of attacks by Palestinians in Israel.</p>

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, the spokesman for President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, said that Mr. Abbas's office had reached out to the United States to ask for its help in ending the Israeli campaign.

"All of this will have dangerous and destructive consequences," Abu Rudeineh said on Palestine TV.

NABLUS, West Bank (AP) — Israeli forces raided a stronghold of an armed group in the occupied West Bank's second largest city, blowing up an explosives lab and engaging in a firefight, the military said Tuesday. Five Palestinians were killed and 20 were wounded, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry.

The overnight raid in the old city, or kasbah, of Nablus, was one of the deadliest in the West Bank in 2022 and comes at a time of escalating tensions.

Television footage showed flames and smoke rising in the night sky over Nablus.

The target of the raid was a group of Palestinian gunmen calling themselves the Lions' Den. The group was responsible for the recent fatal shooting of an Israeli soldier and several attempted attacks, the army said.

The five men killed in the raid were in their 20s and 30s, the Health Ministry said. Several of the wounded were in serious condition, the ministry said.

Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid told Kan public radio that Wadie Houh, a leader of the Lion's Den group, was killed in a shootout with Israeli troops overnight. "Israel will never be deterred from acting for the sake of its security," he said.

Elsewhere in the West Bank, the army said troops fired at a suspect who threw an explosive at them during an arrest raid near the village of Nebi Saleh. The Palestinian Health Ministry reported the death of 19-year-old Qusai al-Tamimi.

Ongoing Israeli arrest raids in the West Bank pose a serious challenge to the Palestinian self-rule government, which administers just over one-third of the territory.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas relies on security cooperation with Israel, particularly against his Islamic militant rivals, to remain in power. At the same time, this cooperation is deeply unpopular among Palestinians who chafe against Israel's open-ended occupation, now in its 56th year.

Younger Palestinians are particularly disillusioned. Small bands of gunmen have formed in some areas, first in the Jenin refugee camp, a stronghold of militants, and now in Nablus. These groups challenge the Palestinian Authority and carry out attacks against Israeli targets.

In Tuesday's raid, Israeli forces blew up an explosives lab in an apartment in Nablus, the military said. The statement said a number of militants were targeted and noted that Palestinians were reporting casualties. From the wording of the statement it was not immediately clear if some of those killed and wounded were hit in an initial ambush rather than a subsequent firefight.

Abbas' spokesman, Nabil Abu Rdeneh, issued a statement in which he described the ongoing Israeli raids as a war crime.

More than 125 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli-Palestinian fighting in the West Bank and east Jerusalem this year. The fighting has surged since a series of Palestinian attacks killed 19 people in Israel in the spring. The Israeli army says most of the Palestinians killed have been militants. But

	<p>stone-throwing youths protesting the incursions and others not involved in confrontations have also been killed.</p> <p>Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war and has built more than 130 settlements there, many of which resemble small towns, with apartment blocks, shopping malls and industrial zones. The Palestinians want the West Bank to form the main part of their future state. Most countries view the settlements as a violation of international law.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 NTSB: seaplane mechanical issue in crash
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Agency-finds-possible-cause-of-seaplane-crash-17531669.php
GIST	<p>SEATTLE (AP) — A mechanical issue may have caused the seaplane crash that killed 10 people off an island in Washington state last month, U.S. investigators said Monday.</p> <p>The National Transportation Safety Board, the agency investigating the Sept. 4 crash off Whidbey Island, said it appeared a critical part that moved the plane's horizontal tail stabilizer came apart, The Seattle Times reported.</p> <p>That part might have failed because a clamp nut unthreaded and rotated due to a missing or improperly installed lock ring, the investigators found.</p> <p>The failure of the component, called an actuator, during flight "would result in a free-floating horizontal stabilizer, allowing it to rotate uncontrollably ... about its hinge, resulting in a possible loss of airplane control," the NTSB said.</p> <p>The plane, a de Havilland Canada DHC-3 Otter turboprop operated by Renton-based Friday Harbor Seaplanes, crashed into Puget Sound, killing the pilot and all nine passengers. It was about half an hour into a flight to the Seattle suburb of Renton from Friday Harbor, a popular tourist destination in the San Juan Islands.</p> <p>The investigators said that when the wreckage was retrieved, the upper portion of the actuator was still attached to the horizontal stabilizer while the lower portion was attached to its mount in the fuselage.</p> <p>The most recent overhaul of the plane's horizontal stabilizer actuator was completed April 21. The lock ring was not found with the wreckage, but several of the holes drilled in the clamp nut to accept the lock ring were damaged "such that they would not allow for the full insertion of the lock ring."</p> <p>"At this time, the NTSB does not know whether the lock ring was installed before the airplane impacted the water or why the lock ring was not present during the airplane examination," the agency said.</p> <p>The NTSB and the Transportation Safety Board of Canada have asked that the manufacturer draft instructions for all operators of DHC-3 aircraft to inspect the actuator to ensure that the lock ring is properly installed to prevent unthreading of the clamp nut.</p> <p>Witnesses who saw the plane nose dive into Mutiny Bay helped officials identify the crash site. Still, it took over a week and three types of sonar to locate what remained of the plane due to its depth and the current of the channel where the aircraft hit the water.</p> <p>Crews using remotely operated vessels and cranes recovered the majority of the plane's wreckage from the sea floor more than 150 feet (46 meters) below the surface in late September.</p> <p>The victims included a civil rights activist, a business owner, a lawyer, an engineer and the founder of a winery and his family.</p>

	Six bodies have been recovered. Those include the body of 29-year-old Gabby Hanna, which was recovered by witnesses the day of the crash, and five others found during recovery efforts.
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HEADLINE	10/24 Grant Co. fertilizer plant destroyed by fire
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/grant-county-residents-sheltering-in-place-after-fertilizer-plant-fire/
GIST	<p>A small group of residents near Moses Lake have been asked to shelter in place until further notice after a fire on Sunday destroyed a Wilbur Ellis fertilizer plant about a mile away.</p> <p>The plant collapsed after it was fully engulfed in flames on Sunday afternoon, the Grant County Sheriff's Office said.</p> <p>The Grant County Health District advised those living downwind of the smoke, which was drifting northeast, to shelter in place on Sunday. Smoke from the fire may contain noxious chemicals, which can irritate the eyes, nose, throat, airway and lungs, the health district said. Infants, children, the elderly and those with respiratory conditions were advised to avoid outdoor activities or exercise, the health district said.</p> <p>The fire was reported at about 3:15 p.m. on Sunday.</p> <p>The building, about 3 miles southeast of Moses Lake, was fully engulfed by the time Grant County Fire District 5 crews arrived, said Kyle Foreman, Sheriff's Office public information officer. The building collapsed by 5:15 p.m., the Sheriff's Office said.</p> <p>Emergency crews let the fire smolder in an effort to prevent any unnecessary contaminated water runoff from the remains of the building, Foreman said.</p> <p>Bob Horst, battalion commander for Grant County Fire District 5, said the fire was still smoldering Monday afternoon, although with less smoke.</p> <p>The cause of the fire has not been determined yet.</p> <p>Because fertilizer is corrosive to metal, much of the plant structure was wood, which made it more susceptible to fire, Horst said. The plant, which was considered a total loss, was the only one of its kind in Grant County, he said.</p> <p>"It's going to be a pretty big hit to the [agriculture] business and Grant County for a bit," he said.</p> <p>There were no injuries in the fire.</p> <p>The Grant County fire marshal will investigate the fire by Wednesday at the earliest, Horst said. The Department of Ecology will also be in the area to test the air from the smoke, he said.</p> <p>It's not clear what was inside of the building when it caught fire, but the fertilizer at the plant was not considered flammable, Foreman said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 WA 8th grade math scores plummet
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/education/lab/federal-exam-shows-pandemic-hit-8th-grade-math-especially-hard-in-washington/
GIST	The good news: Washington student scores in math and reading are either on par or better than the national average, even with the hardship of the pandemic.

But in one of the largest snapshots of academic achievement since the school closures of 2020, math performance among Washington eighth-graders appeared to be slipping faster than the mean during an already historic plummet. The scores were released over the weekend.

Between 2019 and 2022, eighth-graders' math scores dropped 10 points on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a federal exam administered to a representative sample of more than 100,000 fourth- and eighth-graders across the country. It's often described as "the nation's report card." The national drop in math for eighth-graders was eight points, the biggest decline since 1990, the first year of the NAEP math exams.

The NAEP results, which showed virtually no gains in either math or reading for any state, came with an urgent message from federal officials for districts to make the most of the billions of dollars they received in federal aid during the pandemic. Some of that money was explicitly aimed at resolving the academic declines now being seen in the NAEP scores. [A state website](#) last updated in September showed Washington districts have yet to claim about 55% of these set-aside dollars for academic recovery.

"If this doesn't have you fired up ... you're in the wrong profession," Miguel Cardona, the U.S. Education secretary, said of the scores during a call with reporters last week. Other officials pointed to the consequences that these losses could pose for students' abilities to get jobs in fields such as math, science and technology.

In reading and in the fourth grade math exam, Washington scores declined to roughly the same degree as other locales. But the most sobering trends were the ones that didn't change at all. In eighth-grade math, for example, the gap in scores between Washington's Hispanic/Latinx and white students was 30 points, almost the same as it was in 2003. In eighth-grade reading, the 29-point gap between Black and white students in Washington hasn't improved since 1998.

NAEP exams are graded on a 500-point scale. The state's overall scores in math and reading were the highest on the West Coast, but somewhat lower than Massachusetts, which is often compared to Washington on education matters. The feds' analysis included some results for individual large school districts, but none of them were in the Northwest.

Results from the state's assessment of students [last spring](#) also showed declines. Those scores, however, are not comparable to the results of other states, since each state gets to pick the type of exam they use. In 2019, 48.8% of kids met standards in math, while 59% met standards in English. By spring 2022, those numbers had fallen to 37.7% and 50.7%, respectively.

The decline in scores nationwide is generally associated with family hardship, disruption of academics during school closures and online learning. Some [recent research](#) has pointed to lower test scores among students who were learning remotely for longer, such as in Washington and across the West Coast.

At the state level, however, it's hard to tell how much of an effect remote schooling had on learning. State exam results from fall 2021 showed school districts on the west side of the state, where schools were closed the longest, didn't appear to have dramatic differences in their academic declines compared to districts on the east side of the state, where schools reopened as early as fall 2020.

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HEADLINE	10/24 Recall: dry shampoos
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/nation-world/unilever-dry-shampoo-recall/507-85aabf3e-0c86-4c16-9078-0ba760faf01f
GIST	WASHINGTON — Unilever is recalling certain lots of 19 dry shampoo products because they could have elevated levels of benzene, a known carcinogen.

The recall includes aerosol dry shampoo sprays from Dove, Nexxus, Suave, Rockaholic, Bed Head, and TRESemmé, the company said in a [notice](#) via the FDA's website. The products were distributed at stores nationwide and online.

The recall only affects some lots of the products, all produced before October 2021. If you may have one of the affected sprays, you can check for its description, UPC and lot code [here](#).

Customers who have the recalled sprays in their cabinets should stop using them immediately, Unilever said. Refunds are available through the company's website for the recall, [UnileverRecall.com](#).

What is benzene, and how did it get into the products?

Benzene is a common chemical linked to various health risks in humans, including cancer. [The CDC says](#) long-term benzene exposure can harm the bone marrow and cause a decrease in red blood cells, leading to anemia. It can also cause excessive bleeding and harm the immune system.

Benzene is found in low levels in outdoor and indoor air. It can be formed naturally and is widely used in industrial production. People are exposed to the chemical regularly from sources like tobacco smoke, paint and detergents.

Unilever said the recalled products had "potentially elevated levels of benzene," but not enough of the chemical to harm customers. It added that it has not received any reports of illness caused by the products.

"Based on an independent health hazard evaluation, daily exposure to benzene in the recalled products at the levels detected in testing would not be expected to cause adverse health consequences," Unilever's notice said.

According to Unilever, an internal investigation discovered that the products' propellant was the source of the problem. The company says it has worked with its suppliers to address the issue.

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HEADLINE	10/24 Flood watch Bolt Creek fire burn scar area
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/residents-near-bolt-creek-fire-warned-possible-extended-closures-us-2-amid-flash-flood-watch/N7XPQQH5PVFT3NBR72XY3BEYPQ/
GIST	<p>SKYKOMISH, Wash. — A flash flood watch is now in place in the area of the Bolt Creek Fire burn scar through Tuesday afternoon, according to the National Weather Service.</p> <p>According to NWS, a flash flood watch is issued when conditions are favorable for flash flooding.</p> <p>The watch would be upgraded to a flash flood warning if flash flooding is imminent or actively occurring in the area.</p> <p>The towns of Skykomish, Grotto and Baring, between mileposts 38 and 50 of U.S. Highway 2, are affected by the watch.</p> <p>Skykomish Mayor Henry Sladek told KIRO 7 that the city is expecting more periodic and unplanned closures in the coming weeks that could last anywhere from a few minutes to a few days.</p> <p>According to Sladek, the city's government is working to inform its residents to be prepared for closures of up to two weeks, and is hosting a public awareness meeting on Wednesday.</p> <p>Some local city governments along Highway 2 say road closures from the Bolt Creek Fire have impacted not only travel, but business as well.</p>

"I know the state department of commerce and the local chamber of commerce are working with local businesses to see and try to put a figure on what that amount is on what they may have lost due to that lack of traffic," Goldbar Mayor Steven Yarbrough said.

KIRO 7 caught up with several people who live in the area about how the past few weeks have been difficult for many.

"It's been super smokey. I haven't been leaving my house. I usually walk her every day and I haven't been able to walk her," Rylee Reynolds of Goldbar said.

Areas located downhill and downstream from burned areas are susceptible to flash flooding and debris flows, especially near steep terrain, according to NWS.

The Bolt Creek Fire scar is especially susceptible to flooding and mudslides after burning more than 14,000 acres.

Some residents say whenever there is debris or flooding along the highway, it can be an absolute nightmare.

"They don't know what we go through in town. And it's desperate to get out here. Some of us have to get a flooded car out of the water, get it running and then get it to the store," Rich Townsend said.

NWS says heavy rain capable of producing flash flooding and debris flows in burn areas can develop nearly as fast as it can be detected by NWS radar.

According to NWS, a general rule of thumb is that half an inch of rainfall in less than an hour can be enough to cause flash flooding in a burn area.

U.S. 2 is open as of Monday afternoon, but unplanned closures are possible, according to the Washington State Department of Transportation.

WSDOT advises anyone planning to travel along US 2 to be prepared for unexpected closures and monitor radio or the WSDOT app for updates.

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HEADLINE	10/24 Tyson Foods settlement to pay WA \$10.5M
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/tyson-foods-pay-washington-105m-chicken-price-fixing-settlement/3QOQKFDYZEXZD24Y7SN34OXPE/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The nation's largest chicken producer will pay Washington \$10.5 million as part of a settlement in a price-fixing scheme.</p> <p>The lawsuit against Tyson Foods is the third from Attorney General Bob Ferguson, who has sued 19 broiler chicken producers in total.</p> <p>Tyson Foods and the 18 other chicken producers have driven up the price of chicken since at least 2008, according to the attorney general's office.</p> <p>Ferguson says the price fixing affected an estimated 90% of Washingtonians, or approximately 7 million individuals.</p> <p>"These corporate executives make more money than most Washingtonians can imagine, yet they decided to cheat those hardworking Washington families in order to satisfy their greed," Ferguson said.</p> <p>"We will do everything in our power to make Washingtonians whole for the harm done to them by this price-rigging conspiracy."</p>

	<p>As part of the court order, Tyson Foods will now conduct internal training and certify that it has corporate policies that ensure the company follows state and federal antitrust laws.</p> <p>Alaska and New Mexico also have similar antitrust cases pending against national chicken producers. The attorney general's office says it is now working on a plan to distribute the funds to Washington residents, once the remaining lawsuits are settled.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 WA 3rd-lowest FAFSA completion rate in US
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/thousands-students-missing-out-aid-washington-has-third-lowest-fafsa-completion-rate-us/OVGN5N546VFL5KMPZN6MGGOOLM/
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — State legislators are speaking out after 14,700 Washington students missed out on receiving financial assistance for college or career training last year.</p> <p>Only 41.7% of 12th-grade students in Washington complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, the third-lowest rate in the country, according to a news release from the Washington State Governor's Office.</p> <p>"Any education after high school will advance you economically. You might go for a credential, a certification, or a degree — it's not just four years of college or nothing," said Sarah Weiss, Washington Student Achievement Council's director of college access initiatives. "There's a huge array of financial aid programs that can help you — but you need to apply."</p> <p>WSAC and several state legislators are now working to find ways to solicit more FAFSA applications, including a campaign to help school districts organize financial aid advising events and a free texting service that sends reminders to high school seniors.</p> <p>The legislature also passed a bill earlier this year that allocates funds for WSAC to conduct a statewide marketing campaign to promote these programs.</p> <p>"If we want to fix this, we've got to run it like a campaign. We've got to run some ads," said Rep. Drew Hansen. "Some of it's going to be in high schools, and some of it's going to be partnering with libraries. And then we're going to prequalify people and do direct outreach to people who are receiving other state benefits."</p> <p>The FAFSA form for the 2023-2024 school year opened Oct. 1. While there is no immediate deadline to apply, applying early can maximize a student's opportunities for receiving aid.</p> <p>"Most private colleges and many public colleges these days offer a much different price than the one you see on the website, once you account for aid," said James Miller, associate provost and dean of admission at Seattle University. "The no. 1 thing that students can do for themselves is to sit down with their families and complete the FAFSA."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 Federal Reserve losing billions
SOURCE	https://finance.yahoo.com/news/fed-losing-billions-wiping-profits-060001473.html
GIST	<p>(Bloomberg) -- Profits and losses aren't usually thought of as a consideration for central banks, but rapidly mounting red ink at the Federal Reserve and many peers risks becoming more than just an accounting oddity.</p> <p>The bond market is enduring its worst selloff in a generation, triggered by high inflation and the aggressive interest-rate hikes that central banks are implementing. Falling bond prices, in turn, mean paper losses on the massive holdings that the Fed and others accumulated during their rescue efforts in recent years.</p>

Rate hikes also involve central banks paying out more interest on the reserves that commercial banks park with them. That's tipped the Fed into operating losses, creating a hole that may ultimately require the Treasury Department to fill via debt sales. The UK Treasury is already preparing to make up a loss at the Bank of England.

Britain's move highlights a dramatic shift in countries including the US, where central banks are no longer significant contributors to government revenues. The US Treasury will see a "stunning swing," going from receiving about \$100 billion last year from the Fed to a potential annual loss rate of \$80 billion by year-end, according to Amherst Pierpont Securities LLC.

The accounting losses threaten to fuel criticism of the asset purchase programs undertaken to rescue markets and economies, most recently when Covid-19 shuttered large swathes of the global economy in 2020. Coinciding with the current outbreak in inflation, that could spur calls to rein in monetary policy makers' independence, or limit what steps they can take in the next crisis.

"The problem with central bank losses are not the losses per se -- they can always be recapitalized -- but the political backlash central banks are likely to increasingly face," said Jerome Haegeli, chief economist at Swiss Re, who previously worked at Switzerland's central bank.

The following figures illustrate the scope of operating losses or mark-to-market balance-sheet losses now materializing:

Fed remittances owed to the US Treasury reached a negative \$5.3 billion as of Oct. 19 -- a sharp contrast with the positive figures seen as recently as the end of August. A negative number amounts to an IOU that would be repaid via any future income.

The Reserve Bank of Australia posted an accounting loss of A\$36.7 billion (\$23 billion) for the 12 months through June, leaving it with a A\$12.4 billion negative-equity position.

Dutch central bank Governor Klaas Knot, warned last month he expects cumulative losses of about 9 billion euro (\$8.8 billion) for the coming years.

The Swiss National Bank reported a loss of 95.2 billion francs (\$95 billion) for the first six months of the year as the value of its foreign-exchange holdings slumped -- the worst first-half performance since it was established in 1907.

While for a developing country, losses at the central bank can undermine confidence and contribute to a general exodus of capital, that sort of credibility challenge isn't likely for a rich nation.

As Seth Carpenter, chief global economist for Morgan Stanley and a former US Treasury official put it: "The losses don't have a material effect on their ability to conduct monetary policy in the near term."

RBA Deputy Governor Michele Bullock said in response to a question last month about the Australian central bank's negative-equity position that "we don't believe that we are impacted at all in our capacity to operate." After all, "we can create money. That's what we did when we bought the bonds," she noted.

But there can still be consequences. Central banks had already become politically charged institutions after, by their own admission, they failed to anticipate and act quickly against budding inflation over the past year or more. Incurring losses adds another magnet for criticism.

ECB Implications

For the European Central Bank, the potential for mounting losses comes after years of purchases of government bonds conducted despite the reservations of conservative officials arguing they blurred the lines between monetary and fiscal policy.

With inflation running at five times the ECB's target, pressure is mounting to dispose of the bond holdings -- a process called quantitative tightening that the ECB is currently preparing for even as the economic outlook darkens.

"Although there are no clear economic constraints to the central bank running losses, there is the possibility that these become more of a political constraint on the ECB," Goldman Sachs Group Inc. economists George Cole and Simon Freyenet said. Particularly in northern Europe, it "may fuel the discussion of quantitative tightening."

President Christine Lagarde hasn't given any indication that the ECB's decision on QT will be driven by the prospect of incurring losses. She told lawmakers in Brussels last month that generating profits isn't part of central banks' task, insisting that fighting inflation remains policymakers' "only purpose."

As for the Fed, Republicans have in the past voiced opposition to its practice of paying interest on surplus bank reserves. Congress granted that authority back in 2008 to help the Fed control interest rates. With the Fed now incurring losses, and the Republicans potentially taking control of at least one chamber of Congress in the November midterm elections, the debate may resurface.

The Fed's turnaround could be particularly notable. After paying as much as \$100 billion to the Treasury in 2021, it could face losses of more than \$80 billion on an annual basis if policymakers raise rates by 75 basis points in November and 50 basis points in December -- as markets anticipate -- estimates Stephen Stanley, chief economist for Amherst Pierpont.

Without the income from the Fed, the Treasury then needs to sell more debt to the public to fund government spending.

"This may be too arcane to hit the public's radar, but a populist could spin the story in a way that would not reflect well on the Fed," Stanley wrote in a note to clients this month.

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HEADLINE	10/24 Flu, RSV, other viruses surge in young kids
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/rsv-flu-respiratory-viruses-surging-children-infants-rcna53367
GIST	<p>An unseasonal early surge of respiratory viruses among babies and toddlers has caught doctors off guard and worried about the coming months.</p> <p>Pediatricians and children's hospitals were prepared for a bad flu season. They were not ready for a multitude of viruses to come all at once and earlier than expected.</p> <p>"There is no one virus that's causing pediatric respiratory viruses this fall," said Dr. Deanna Behrens, a pediatric critical care physician at Advocate Children's Hospital in suburban Chicago. "Unfortunately, it's all of them."</p> <p>Babies and preschool-aged children are coming down with the flu, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), parainfluenza viruses, adenoviruses, rhinoviruses and enteroviruses in ways never before imagined, Behrens and other infectious diseases experts said.</p> <p>"We see kids where, when we do the nasal swab, not only do they test positive for influenza, but they may have RSV or enterovirus or adenovirus at the same time," said Dr. Mark Kline, the physician-in-chief at Children's Hospital New Orleans. "We've seen kids where we've gotten two or three viruses at once."</p> <p>A third of hospitalizations for the flu are in children, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told NBC News in a statement. A third of those hospitalizations are in kids under age 5.</p>

Babies and toddlers are most at risk for severe respiratory illness. Their tiny airways and infantile immune systems have trouble clearing the buildup of mucus that comes with colds and other respiratory illnesses.

The CDC data come from [FluSurv-NET](#), which covers counties in 14 states, representing about 9% of the U.S. population.

The flu is spreading at an especially high rate in Georgia, New York, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Washington, D.C., according to the [latest flu report](#) from the CDC. Of the children hospitalized for flu, 80%, according to FluSurv-NET, are in Georgia.

While RSV is inundating many children's hospitals, the number of pediatric flu cases is also increasing. "We've seen numbers doubling on a weekly basis," said Dr. Sarah Combs, an emergency medicine physician at Children's National in Washington, D.C.

Why are RSV, other viruses on the rise?

Viruses thrive in populations that have never experienced them. It's why small children are most vulnerable now to respiratory viruses. When the pandemic hit in 2020, those children were mostly home for their first few years of life, cocooned from viruses that, in general, strengthen their infantile immune systems. When they weren't exposed, they were left vulnerable.

"What we lacked is a couple of years of little kids developing the immunity that's needed to keep these colds at bay," said Dr. Buddy Creech, a pediatric infectious disease expert at the Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee. "We may be in for a rough six or seven weeks with influenza and RSV."

Indeed, "reduced population immunity to circulating respiratory illnesses, particularly among young children who may never have had exposure or been vaccinated, could bring about a robust return of flu and other respiratory viruses, like RSV," Lynnette Brammer, team lead of the Domestic Influenza Surveillance Team at the CDC, wrote in an email.

The viruses are also popping up earlier than what would normally be expected. Even though the flu typically [peaks between December and February](#), cases are rising steadily, especially in the Southeast.

"I don't know that we're all quite emotionally ready for RSV and flu season," Creech said. "We knew this was going to be a half-marathon style of a race. Now it looks like it may be even longer. Maybe it's a whole marathon."

The fast, severe rise in pediatric cases is contributing to pressure on hospitals.

In 17 states, pediatric hospital bed occupancy is at 80% or greater, according to data from the Department of Health and Human Services. Nationwide, nearly 75% of the country's estimated 40,000 pediatric beds are full — months before their anticipated winter peak.

Most kids with the flu, Kline said, have typical symptoms: fever, sore throat, cough, body aches and fatigue. But the fact that kids are testing positive for multiple respiratory viruses at once can blur the signs of any one virus. RSV can cause symptoms similar to the flu.

Indeed, RSV "has hit earlier and harder," said Dr. Sarah Combs, an emergency medicine physician at Children's National in Washington, D.C. Combs said her staff is in the midst of a surge in RSV cases.

"We normally expect to see that in the November-December time frame," she said. In addition to RSV, Combs expects the number of pediatric flu illnesses to double in the coming weeks. In 2021, Children's National treated eight flu cases in kids between July and October. In 2022 so far, Combs and her colleagues have treated 80 such children. It's a tenfold increase over last year.

	<p>The early surge in pediatric viral illness has caught many clinicians "off guard," said Callie Dobbins, a nurse and facility executive at Levine Children's Hospital in Charlotte, North Carolina.</p> <p>"We just stabilized from the pandemic, and now we're engulfed with children who need us," she said.</p> <p>Other viruses, too, are affecting children. Creech said his team continues to see croup, which is caused by parainfluenza virus. And just last month, the CDC issued an advisory about a particular type of enterovirus, called EV-D68.</p> <p>"Our enterovirus numbers are not ideal right now. They're still very high," Creech said.</p> <p>Although it primarily causes acute respiratory illness, EV-D68 has been associated with acute flaccid myelitis (AFM), a rare polio-like condition that can cause limb weakness and other problems within the nervous system.</p> <p>It's flu, however, that's most concerning for pediatricians, for now, at least.</p> <p>"What we're planning for is a more severe flu season, specifically for children," Dobbins said, "We expect this challenge that we're experiencing now to continue through flu season."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 Iran, Venezuela alliance challenges US
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/world/iran-and-venezuela-strengthen-dangerous-military-economic-alliance-in-challenge-to-us
GIST	<p>In a move widely lambasted by Republicans, President Biden recently sought to resume Venezuelan oil imports in exchange for a promise of free and fair elections in 2024, a move which critics argue would only strengthen the hand of the Nicolás Maduro dictatorship. The move comes at a time of closer relations between the two U.S. enemies.</p> <p>Iran and Venezuela, both petroleum-rich OPEC members with international pariah status, have recently found solidarity in coordinated geopolitical, economic, and military maneuvers against shared common enemy the United States, which has subjected them to a regimen of economic sanctions for years.</p> <p>Ties between the nations were close under Venezuela's socialist president Hugo Chavez, but strengthened further under Maduro, who has sought a lifeline from Iran's Islamist regime. While Venezuela enjoys what are believed to be the world's largest petroleum deposits, years of mismanagement, corruption and maintenance issues have dramatically hampered its production and refining capabilities.</p> <p>Former diplomat and current Venezuelan political dissident Isaias Medina views the alliance as a clear and present threat to the United States: "In my opinion, the countries of the Axis of Evil are increasing their presence on Venezuelan territory to strengthen their state policy of pursuing de facto control of a government that is based on asymmetric warfare against the West...this is where the interests of Venezuela-Iran -China-Russia-Cuba align." Medina quit his position with the Venezuelan mission to the UN where he served in a senior position over Maduro's policies.</p> <p>Geopolitical analysts have noted that the Maduro regime is now pursuing a policy which offers economic and territorial control to rogue states in exchange for access to its vast resources, including petroleum, gold and potentially even uranium.</p> <p>In June of this year, Venezuela and Iran signed a 20-year cooperation plan which involves Iranian assistance in repair and maintenance of existing Venezuelan refineries, as well as other technical and engineering expertise. The two nations also signed a deal whereby Iran will deliver four oil tankers to Venezuela through the Iranian company SADRA. Weekly flights between Caracas and Tehran commenced in July, prompting speculation that cargo could include military hardware.</p>

Currently, Venezuela lacks both the investment capital and the expertise to resurrect its once formidable oil industry. With Russia's Rosneft sidelined by U.S. sanctions, the Maduro regime has looked to Iran to step into the gap. Iran has sent fleets of fuel-laden tanker ships to alleviate Venezuela's crises before, and also helped to export Venezuela's crude in the face of crippling U.S. sanctions that have to some degree scared off both Russia and China, long term allies.

One curious new feature of the Iran-Venezuela relationship involves a new supermarket, Megasis, launched in 2020. Perched on the eastern edge of Caracas, the 200,000 square foot megastore sits next to Venezuela's largest and most notorious slum, Petare, where it stocks a dazzling array of over 2,500 Iranian products, many considered novelties to its new customers.

However, Medina deems the venture, "another smokescreen to disguise their true intentions...profitability is not their interest, it is merely the public face hiding the true agenda behind the 'supermarket': arms agreements, training, exchange of strategic resources, oil, and military hardware on the one hand, and maybe even uranium on the other."

Iranian dissident Banafsheh Zand views the supermarket itself as a public relations ploy, designed to obscure the more nefarious intents on the part of both regimes: "It's designed to show (the Venezuelan people) ...we are so competent and good at foreign relations, we actually have friends that come and help us...people who care about the people of Venezuela."

However, given the current economic hardships and deprivations in Iran, Zand argues that it is an unseemly vanity project.

"This is the ultimate show of just who these people are. In Iran, the price of regular staples is through the roof; an egg costs the equivalent of \$5... It's a cute way of giving the finger to the rest of the world."

Venezuela saw the U.S. and most of its allies recognize opposition leader Juan Guaido as president, while Maduro and top lieutenants have been indicted by the U.S. Justice Department on drug trafficking and money laundering charges.

Iran is currently seeking to renegotiate the Iran Nuclear Deal with the Biden administration, despite strident objections from Congressional Republicans and some Democrats. It is also under threat from violent protests which have swept the nation in recent weeks. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi blamed the U.S. for the unrest, alleging that it sought to spread "chaos, terror, and destruction."

With constant flow of tankers, cargo ships and planes between the two countries, the supermarket is likely a small piece in a much more nefarious geopolitical battle involving money laundering, arms trafficking, drug trafficking, and dictatorship.

Medina argues that the Venezuela-Iran relationships involves, "uniting strategic pieces converging against Western interests: Venezuela is the headquarters of these countries of the Axis of Evil, seeking to gain ground in South America and destabilize the West."

The Venezuelan government's intent also involves infiltrating the United States. Zand alleges, "the government of Venezuela creates fake passports for Iranian, Syrian, Yemeni nationals" in order to facilitate their movement into and throughout the West, yet "the Biden administration is willing to make a deal with a regime that does this."

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HEADLINE	10/25 German president arrives in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/german-president-arrives-ukraine-tensions-rise-92044053
GIST	KYIV, Ukraine -- Germany's president arrived in Kyiv Tuesday for his first visit to Ukraine since the start of Russia's invasion, a trip that comes amid Moscow's unsubstantiated warnings of a "dirty bomb" attack as the conflict enters its ninth month.

President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said after arriving that “it was important to me in this phase of air attacks with drones, cruise missiles and rockets to send a signal of solidarity to Ukrainians,” German news agency dpa reported.

Steinmeier’s spokesperson, Cerstin Gammelin, posted a picture of him in Kyiv on Tuesday. “Our solidarity is unbroken, and it will remain so,” she tweeted.

The German president, whose position is largely ceremonial, made it to Ukraine on his third try.

In April, he was planning to visit the country with his Polish and Baltic counterparts, but said his presence “apparently ... wasn’t wanted in Kyiv.” Steinmeier has been criticized in Ukraine for allegedly cozying up to Russia during his time as Germany’s foreign minister.

Last week, a planned trip was put off because of security concerns.

Steinmeier’s visit comes as Ukrainians are bracing for less electric power this winter following a sustained Russian barrage on their infrastructure in recent weeks. Citizens in the southern city of Mykolaiv lined up for water and essential supplies Tuesday as Ukrainian forces advanced on the nearby Russian-occupied city of Kherson.

Ukrainian authorities tried to dampen public fears over Russia’s use of Iranian drones to strike the country’s infrastructure, claiming increasing success Monday in shooting them down.

Ukraine’s forces have shot down more than two-thirds of the approximately 330 Shahed drones that Russia has fired through Saturday, the head of Ukraine’s intelligence service, Kyrylo Budanov, said Monday. Budanov said Russia’s military had ordered about 1,700 drones of different types and is rolling out a second batch of about 300 Shaheds.

Although Russia and Iran deny that the Iranian-built drones have been used, the distinctive triangle-shaped Shahed-136s have rained down on civilians in Kyiv and elsewhere.

Britain’s Ministry of Defense said Russia was likely to use a large number of drones to try to penetrate the “increasingly effective Ukrainian air defenses” — to substitute for Russian-made long-range precision weapons “which are becoming increasingly scarce.”

That assessment came on top of a stark warning by Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu to his British, French, Turkish and U.S. counterparts over the weekend that Ukrainian forces were preparing a “provocation” involving a radioactive device — a so-called dirty bomb. Britain, France, and the United States rejected that claim as “transparently false.”

A dirty bomb uses explosives to scatter radioactive waste in an effort to sow terror. Such weapons don’t have the devastating destruction of a nuclear explosion, but could expose broad areas to radioactive contamination.

Russian authorities on Monday doubled down on Shoigu’s warning.

Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov, head of the Russian military’s radiation, chemical and biological protection forces, said Russian military assets were on high readiness for possible radioactive contamination. He told reporters a dirty bomb blast could contaminate thousands of square kilometers (miles).

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov emphasized that “it’s not an unfounded suspicion, we have serious reasons to believe that such things could be planned.”

Ukraine has rejected Moscow's claims as an attempt to distract attention from its own plans to detonate a dirty bomb. German Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht on Monday dismissed as "outrageous" the Russian claim that Ukraine could use a dirty bomb.

The White House on Monday again underscored that the Russian allegations were false.

"It's just not true. We know it's not true," John Kirby, a spokesman for the National Security Council, said. "In the past, the Russians have, on occasion, blamed others for things that they were planning to do."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy suggested that Moscow itself was setting the stage for deploying a radioactive device on Ukrainian soil. He also urged citizens to conserve their use of electricity, as an estimated 30% of the country's power plants have been destroyed or badly damaged in recent weeks.

"Now is definitely not the time for bright storefronts and signs," he said.

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Cyber, Tech Awareness

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HEADLINE	10/24 #StopRansomware: Daixin Team
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/cybersecurity/stopransomware-daixin-team/
GIST	<p><i>This joint Cybersecurity Advisory (CSA) is part of an ongoing #StopRansomware effort to publish advisories for network defenders that detail various ransomware variants and ransomware threat actors. These #StopRansomware advisories include recently and historically observed tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) and indicators of compromise (IOCs) to help organizations protect against ransomware. Visit stopransomware.gov to see all #StopRansomware advisories and to learn more about other ransomware threats and no-cost resources.</i></p> <p>The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) are releasing this joint CSA to provide information on the "Daixin Team," a cybercrime group that is actively targeting U.S. businesses, predominantly in the Healthcare and Public Health (HPH) Sector, with ransomware and data extortion operations.</p> <p>This joint CSA provides TTPs and IOCs of Daixin actors obtained from FBI threat response activities and third-party reporting.</p> <p>Cybercrime actors routinely target HPH Sector organizations with ransomware:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• As of October 2022, per FBI Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) data, specifically victim reports across all 16 critical infrastructure sectors, the HPH Sector accounts for 25 percent of ransomware complaints.• According to an IC3 annual report in 2021, 649 ransomware reports were made across 14 critical infrastructure sectors; the HPH Sector accounted for the most reports at 148. <p>The Daixin Team is a ransomware and data extortion group that has targeted the HPH Sector with ransomware and data extortion operations since at least June 2022. Since then, Daixin Team cybercrime actors have caused ransomware incidents at multiple HPH Sector organizations where they have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deployed ransomware to encrypt servers responsible for healthcare services—including electronic health records services, diagnostics services, imaging services, and intranet services, and/or• Exfiltrated personal identifiable information (PII) and patient health information (PHI) and threatened to release the information if a ransom is not paid. <p>Daixin actors gain initial access to victims through virtual private network (VPN) servers. In one confirmed compromise, the actors likely exploited an unpatched vulnerability in the organization's VPN server [T1190]. In another confirmed compromise, the actors used previously compromised credentials to</p>

	access a legacy VPN server [T1078] that did not have multifactor authentication (MFA) enabled. The actors are believed to have acquired the VPN credentials through the use of a phishing email with a malicious attachment [T1598.002].
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HEADLINE	10/24 Wisconsin school district ransomware hack
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/ransomware-group-claims-attack-on-wisconsin-school-district/
GIST	<p>A ransomware group took responsibility for a cyberattack on a school district in Wisconsin serving nearly 20,000 students.</p> <p>The Snatch ransomware group added the Kenosha Unified School District to its list of victims on Sunday morning but did not say how much data was stolen during the attack or what kind of files were taken.</p> <p>The school district did not respond to requests for comment but on September 29, officials published a notice about a cyberattack that began on September 25.</p> <p>The school district said it notified staff and families that it “proactively took certain portions of its network offline after it experienced a cybersecurity incident.”</p> <p>They contacted law enforcement and hired a cybersecurity firm to investigate the incident. The school eventually brought systems back online and said it would review the incident to “mitigate any potential impact to data.”</p> <p>The incident comes as U.S. government agencies seek to beef up security around K-12 schools after dozens of high profile attacks throughout 2022 — including a headline grabbing ransomware attack on one of the country’s largest school districts.</p> <p>Last week, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) director Jen Easterly said that over the next year they will focus efforts on improving the digital defenses of three critical infrastructure sectors, one of which was the nation’s K-12 schools.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 CNC machines vulnerable to hijacking
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/cnc-machines-vulnerable-hijacking-data-theft-damaging-cyberattacks
GIST	<p>Researchers at cybersecurity firm Trend Micro have shown that the computer numerical control (CNC) machines present in many modern manufacturing facilities are vulnerable to hacker attacks.</p> <p>Trend Micro is presenting the research this week at SecurityWeek’s 2022 ICS Cyber Security Conference in Atlanta, which can also be joined online via SecurityWeek’s virtual event platform. Registration for the event is still open.</p> <p>CNC machines can be programmed to carry out a wide range of tasks with a high level of efficiency, consistency and accuracy. They include mills, lathes, plasma cutters, electric discharge machines, water jet cutters, and punch presses.</p> <p>CNC machines are increasingly complex, enabling users to operate them remotely and extend their functionality by installing add-ins. This increasing complexity means they can be increasingly vulnerable to cyberattacks.</p> <p>Trend Micro researchers have analyzed CNC products from Haas, Okuma, Heidenhain and Fanuc, which are used by manufacturing organizations worldwide. The analysis showed that the machines provided by each of these vendors are vulnerable to roughly a dozen types of attacks.</p>

The researchers demonstrated that an attacker could cause damage or disruption, they can hijack a machine, or steal valuable intellectual property. Each of these scenarios could have a significant financial impact on an organization.

For instance, a hacker could cause damage or disruption to a CNC machine or the item the machine is working on by altering some of the device's geometry or the controller's program. The attacker can cause visible damage, or they can make minor changes that result in a defective product.

Hackers could also disrupt the manufacturing process by triggering alarms that cause the machine to stop operating until a human intervenes. These alarms are designed to stop the machine in case of software or hardware faults, but an attacker could also trigger an alarm.

A threat actor who has access to the CNC machine and its associated systems could launch ransomware attacks, where files are encrypted or legitimate users are prevented from accessing the user interface.

Another risk is related to data theft. These machines are often tasked with making parts for which the design can be highly valuable. An attacker could steal the program run by the targeted machine and then easily reverse engineer it to obtain the code.

In addition, CNC controllers can store valuable information related to production, which can also be useful to threat actors specializing in corporate espionage.

These types of attacks can be prevented, Trend Micro says, by using industrial intrusion detection and prevention systems, segmenting networks, correctly configuring CNC machines, and ensuring that they are always up to date.

The cybersecurity firm started notifying impacted CNC vendors last year and says they have all taken steps to reduce the risk of malicious attacks, including through patches and new security features.

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HEADLINE	10/24 Black Reward targets Iran atomic agency
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/black-reward-hackers-iran-atomic-energy-agency/
GIST	<p>A group of anti-Iranian government hackers have allegedly targeted Iran Atomic Energy Organization's subsidiary's network and managed to access its email server.</p> <p>The hacking group identified as Black Reward has claimed responsibility for the attack on the Iranian nuclear agency's subsidiary, the Atomic Energy Production and Development Company located in Bushehr.</p> <p>The group claims they launched this attack to demand the release of political prisoners arrested during the countrywide protests.</p> <p>On the other hand, the agency has acknowledged that its email server was targeted by hackers and blamed a foreign country for this attack but didn't name the country.</p> <p>"These illegal efforts out of desperation are aimed at attracting public attention," the agency stated.</p> <p>Furthermore, the agency downplayed the severity of the incident, claiming that the stolen data included emails containing "normal and daily exchanges" and technical content.</p> <p>However, hackers claim to have obtained 50GB of internal emails, construction plans, and contact details of the Iranian government's Russian-backed nuclear power plant. The group also leaked some of the data on their Telegram channel. Yet, it is unclear whether the stolen data contained confidential data.</p>

Additionally, Black Reward gave a 24-hour deadline to the government on their [Twitter handle](#) on Friday for exposing documents on the country's nuclear program if all "political prisoners, prisoners of conscience and people arrested in the recent protests." aren't released.

"Unlike Westerners, we do not flirt with criminal mullahs," Black Reward wrote.

On Saturday, the group released some data on social media, which included a brief clip from a nuclear site in Iran and documents containing payslips, agreements, and maps.

Background Information

According to the agency's statement on Sunday, as [reported](#) by Reuters, in this "foreign-backed attack," the attackers' agenda seems to be an attempt to escalate tension amidst Mahsa Amini's death and subsequent protests that have gripped Iran for weeks.

For your information, the Iranian government is dealing with public demonstrations after the suspicious death of a 22-year-old female, Mahsa Amini. The country's moral police detained her for allegedly violating Iran's dress code for women.

After her death, Iran has seen an unprecedented increase in large-scale cyber attacks on its critical government infrastructure. For instance, [Anonymous hackers have launched OpIran](#) in support of protestors, while hackers from different backgrounds are [using Telegram and dark web platforms](#) to teach Iranians how to evade government censorship, how to use VPN, and even carry out cyberattacks against the country's sensitive targets.

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HEADLINE	10/24 UK car dealerships in ransomware attack
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/pendragon-car-dealer-refuses-60-million-lockbit-ransomware-demand/
GIST	<p>Pendragon Group, with more than 200 car dealerships in the U.K., was breached in a cyberattack from the LockBit ransomware gang, who allegedly demanded \$60 million to decrypt files and not leak them.</p> <p>Pendragon owns CarStore, Evans Halshaw, and Stratstone luxury car retailer, that sell brands cars for all budgets, from Jaguar, Porsche, Ferrari, Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Land Rover, or Aston Martin, to Renault, Ford, Hyundai, Nissan, Peugeot, Vauxhall, Citroen, DS, Dacia, and DAF.</p> <p>Pendragon did not provide many details about the security incident and limited the information to saying that there is no impact on operations.</p> <p>"We have identified suspicious activity on part of our IT systems and have confirmed we experienced an IT security incident," Pendragon says in the security announcement.</p> <p>"This has not affected our ability to operate, and we continue to service our customers and communities as normal" – Pendragon</p> <p>However, in an interview for The Times publication on Friday, the company chief marketing officer, Kim Costello, pointed to LockBit ransomware gang as the culprit and said that the attack happened about a month ago.</p> <p>According to Costello, the company has been in contact with the hackers and received stolen files as proof of the breach but did not engage in negotiations.</p> <p>The hackers asked for "tens of millions of dollars before a deadline" under the threat of publishing stolen data, Costello added. According to the U.K. publication, the LockBit asked for a \$60 million ransom.</p> <p>The company spokesperson said that Pendragon stands firm on its decision to not pay the hackers.</p>

	<p>After discovering the attack, Pendragon reported the incident to law enforcement in the U.K. as well as to the country's data protection office.</p> <p>Pendragon's spokesperson also clarified that the company's IT team reacted immediately to the attack. Results from the investigation showed that the hackers stole only 5% of the database.</p> <p>BleepingComputer contacted the company for more info about the stolen data and the impact it would have if the hackers leak it but received no response at publishing time.</p> <p>LockBit's attack on Pendragon comes around the time the U.K. car dealer received a takeover offer of £400 million from the Sweden-based Hedin Mobility Group.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 Cuba ransomware affiliate targets Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/cuba-ransomware-affiliate-targets-ukrainian-govt-agencies/
GIST	<p>The Computer Emergency Response Team of Ukraine (CERT-UA) has issued an alert about potential Cuba Ransomware attacks against critical networks in the country.</p> <p>Starting on October 21, CERT-UA observed a new wave of phishing emails that impersonated the Press Service of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, urging recipients to click on an embedded link.</p> <p>The link takes the recipient to a third-party web page to supposedly download a document named "Hakaz_309.pdf," but they are shown a fake alert stating that the visitor needs to update their PDF reader software first.</p> <p>The website then urges the visitor to click on a "DOWNLOAD" button, which leads to the download of an executable ("AcroRdrDCx642200120169_uk_UA.exe") resembling an Acrobat Reader installer.</p> <p>However, running this file will install and execute the "rmtpak.dll" DLL file, which is Cuba Ransomware's signature malware known as "ROMCOM RAT."</p> <p>ROMCOM was first spotted by researchers at Palo Alto Networks in August 2022, naming the Cuba Ransomware affiliate using the new malware as "Tropical Scorpius."</p> <p>This malware allows the threat actors to perform file operations on the host, steal data, spawn spoofed processes, start reverse shells, and more.</p> <p>"Considering the use of the RomCom backdoor, as well as other features of the related files, we believe it is possible to associate the detected activity with the activity of the group Tropical Scorpius (Unit42) aka UNC2596 (Mandiant), which is responsible for the distribution of Cuba Ransomware," concludes the CERT-UA announcement.</p> <p>Another report published yesterday by BlackBerry gives some additional details about the use of ROMCOM against military institutions in Ukraine, explaining that the malicious executable used in the attacks is signed with a valid digital certificate.</p> <p>BlackBerry also highlights other victims of the malware, located in the Philippines, Brazil, and the United States.</p> <p>In these cases, the attackers use a different payload-dropping site spoofing the legitimate "Advanced IP Scanner" site. Notably, BlackBerry's report didn't link ROMCOM RAT to any threat actors.</p>

	<p>In September 2022, it was revealed that Cuba Ransomware had hit the small Balkan country of Montenegro, demanding a ransom payment of \$10,000,000.</p> <p>While that incident was initially given a geo-political hue, Cuba Ransomware isn't among the hackers who have declared interest in hacktivism, and neither did they take sides in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 Hive claims attack Tata Power, leaks data
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/hive-claims-ransomware-attack-on-tata-power-begins-leaking-data/
GIST	<p>Hive ransomware group has claimed responsibility for a cyber attack disclosed by Tata Power this month.</p> <p>A subsidiary of the multinational conglomerate Tata Group, Tata Power is India's largest integrated power company based in Mumbai.</p> <p>In screenshots seen by BleepingComputer, Hive operators are seen posting data they claim to have stolen from Tata Power, indicating that the ransom negotiations failed.</p> <p>Hive begins leaking data allegedly stolen from Tata Power</p> <p>As of a few hours ago, operators behind the Hive ransomware group are seen leaking data allegedly stolen from Tata Power on their leak site.</p> <p>Cybersecurity analyst and researcher Dominic Alvieri tweeted about the development while tipping us off.</p> <p>Another researcher Rakesh Krishnan shared screenshots of the stolen data—which appears to include Tata Power employees' personally identifiable information (PII), National ID (Aadhar) card numbers, PAN (tax account) numbers, salary information, etc.</p> <p>Additionally, the data dump contains engineering drawings, financial and banking records as well as client information, suggests Krishnan...</p> <p>Hive operators claim that they encrypted Tata Power's data on October 3rd.</p> <p>On Friday, October 14th, Tata Power disclosed a cyber attack on its "IT infrastructure impacting some of its IT systems" in a stock filing without sharing additional information with regard to the whereabouts of the threat actor.</p> <p>"The Company has taken steps to retrieve and restore the systems. All critical operational systems are functioning; however, as a measure of abundant precaution, restricted access and preventive checks have been put in place for employee and customer facing portals and touch points," stated Tata Power's filing, signed by company secretary H.M. Mistry at the time.</p> <p>Threat actors like extortion and ransomware groups typically began leaking or selling data stolen from breaching their targets should the target refuse to pay their ransom demand and subsequent negotiations fail.</p> <p>Hive ransomware in review</p> <p>The Hive ransomware gang is more active and aggressive than its leak site shows, with affiliates attacking an average of three companies every day since the operation became known in late June 2021.</p> <p>The group is known to employ a diverse set of tactics, techniques, and procedures, which makes it difficult for organizations to defend against its attacks, as the FBI has earlier stated.</p>

	<p>In September this year, Hive claimed to be behind the ransomware attacks on New York Racing Association, a Bell Canada subsidiary, as well as a New York-based emergency response and ambulance service provider.</p> <p>Hive's last year attack on Memorial Health System led to the cancellation of surgical and diagnostic operations, and patient data theft.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/25 WhatsApp suffers major outage
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/10/25/tech/whatsapp-outage-service-down-intl-hnk/index.html
GIST	<p>Hong Kong CNN Business — WhatsApp suffered a serious outage on Tuesday, preventing users across the globe from sending or receiving messages on the platform.</p> <p>The world's most popular messaging app started having problems around 3 a.m. ET. As of 4:50 a.m. the service was back for some users, but appeared to remain patchy elsewhere.</p> <p>There were nearly 70,000 reports of outages on the platform, according to data from Down Detector, which tracks service disruptions around the world.</p> <p>The cause of the outage was not immediately clear. WhatsApp is owned by Meta, the global tech giant formerly known as Facebook (FB).</p> <p>In a statement, a company spokesperson told CNN Business that it had resumed service.</p> <p>“We know people had trouble sending messages on WhatsApp today,” the representative said. “We’ve fixed the issue and apologize for any inconvenience.”</p> <p>In a post on Twitter, Down Detector said that user reports indicated that WhatsApp had been “having problems” since 3:17 a.m. ET.</p> <p>WhatsApp is the world's top messaging app, with more than 2 billion users. As much as 31% of the global population uses it, according to a 2022 analysis by digital intelligence platform Similarweb.</p> <p>Many users in India, WhatsApp's biggest market, posted on other social media that they had experienced problems communicating through the app. The country has a whopping 400 million WhatsApp users.</p>
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Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	10/24 Abuse at hands of Kansas native, IS leader
SOURCE	https://hayspost.com/posts/a4f5545f-cdf2-4308-9585-bc6ca811ee65
GIST	<p>ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP) — A Kansas native convicted of leading an all-female battalion of the Islamic State group had a long history of monstrous behavior that included sexual and physical abuse of her own children, family members said in court filings.</p> <p>Prosecutors cited the abuse allegations in seeking a maximum 20-year sentence for Allison Fluke-Ekren, 42, when she is sentenced Nov. 1 for providing material support to the Islamic State group.</p> <p>“Allison Fluke-Ekren brainwashed young girls and trained them to kill. She carved a path of terror, plunging her own children into unfathomable depths of cruelty by physically, psychologically, emotionally, and sexually abusing them,” First Assistant U.S. Attorney Raj Parekh wrote in a sentencing memo spelling out the allegations Fluke-Ekren's own children and parents have made against her.</p>

Fluke-Ekren pleaded guilty to terrorism charges after she admitted that she led the Khatiba Nusaybah, an all-female battalion of the Islamic State, in which roughly 100 women and girls — some as young as 10 years old — learned how to use automatic weapons and detonate grenades and suicide belts.

Parekh's sentencing memo spells out how Fluke-Ekren went from a childhood on an 81-acre farm in Overbrook, Kansas, to an Islamic State leader, traveling from Kansas to Egypt to Libya and then to Islamic State-controlled territory in Syria. Along the way she had 12 children and five different husbands, several of whom were killed in fighting.

Through all the years, family and acquaintances of Fluke-Ekren portrayed her as the driving force who pushed her second husband into radicalization and convinced him to take her and the kids to Egypt. Her plans for an all-female battalion were ignored and rejected by other terrorist groups like Jabhat al-Nusra, and only the Islamic State finally acquiesced to her idea, prosecutors said.

Fluke-Ekren's parents describe her as manipulative and difficult from the start. Family members describe how she would laughingly tell the story of how she tried to drown her brother in an icy lake as children.

Perhaps most disturbing in a laundry list of disturbing reports are allegations from two of her children that she engaged in sexual abuse of her kids.

"My mother would beat my body, leaving my muscles cramping in agony. (She) would then go to her room and masturbate over the fact that she beat me. I could hear her from the other room," one of Fluke-Ekren's daughters, now an adult, wrote in a letter to the court. She is expected to testify at Fluke-Ekren's sentencing hearing.

Fluke-Ekren's oldest child, a son, also says he was molested.

"My mother is a monster who enjoys torturing children for sexual pleasure," he wrote in his own letter to the court.

It is unclear to what extent the abuse allegations will affect the sentence imposed by U.S. District Judge Leonie Brinkema because they are not directly related to the terrorism crimes. The daughter will be allowed to testify at the sentencing hearing because she was a victim of the terrorism — her mother enrolled her in the Khatiba Nusaybah as a child. The son is not expected to testify.

Fluke-Ekren, for her part, is denying many of the abuse allegations. She has complained that she has an inadequate opportunity to refute her family's statements.

Fluke-Ekren "is shocked and saddened by these allegations but acknowledges Witness-1 (her daughter) experienced trauma in Syria," defense attorney Joseph King wrote in his sentencing memo, which seeks a sentence below 20 years. "She cannot undo the pain that she caused in taking Witness-1 to Syria."

Her son said Fluke-Ekren has a long history of denying abuse and people choosing to believe her over her children.

"I know her and I know she wants to lie her way out of this, to get a slap on the wrist and try to use a sob story to once again get power and access to victims," the son wrote.

Other allegations included in prosecutors sentencing memo:

— She urged a woman to commit a suicide bombing. When the woman said she could no longer carry out an attack because she was pregnant, Fluke-Ekren took in the child after his birth so the woman could go forward with the attack.

	<p>— She told others that her oldest son was born after she was raped by an American soldier as a way to ingratiate herself inside the terrorist groups where she sought to increase her status.</p> <p>— She forced her 13-year-old daughter to marry an Islamic State fighter.</p> <p>— In Libya, she sought to establish a school for girls in which she showed young girls videos of Iraqi women being raped by American soldiers. “She would tell us that if we didn’t kill the ‘kuffar’ (non-believer) that we would be raped,” the daughter wrote in court papers about the experience.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 Observers: IS still active in southern Syria
SOURCE	https://www.voanews.com/a/islamic-state-group-still-active-in-southern-syria-observers-say-/6804095.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Despite the heavy presence of Syrian and Russian forces in southern Syria, militants affiliated with the Islamic State group appear to be active in the region.</p> <p>Last week, local fighters, some of whom were affiliated with the Syrian government, carried out an operation targeting several hideouts belonging to IS operatives in a town in the southern province of Daraa. During the raid, at least six IS members were killed, and three houses used as IS operations centers were destroyed, according to local news reports.</p> <p>The multi-day operation, which ended Sunday, seemed to be in response to an October 13 bombing of a military bus in the Syrian capital of Damascus that killed at least 18 Syrian soldiers.</p> <p>Russia, a strong backer of the Syrian government, has accused IS cells in Daraa of carrying out the attack.</p> <p>The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights told VOA it couldn't confirm whether the individuals targeted in Daraa were responsible for orchestrating the Damascus bombing.</p> <p>"But what is certain is that those killed in the town of Jasim [in Daraa] were Syrian and Iraqi nationals that were indeed members of Daesh," said Rami Abdulrahman, director of the U.K.-based observatory, using an Arabic acronym for the terror group.</p> <p>A media activist in Daraa who requested anonymity for safety reasons told VOA that one of the IS operatives killed during the clashes last week was a high-profile leader responsible for assassinating several former opposition figures in southern Syria.</p> <p>Occasional attacks</p> <p>Since 2018, when Syrian government forces and allied militias recaptured the region from rebel forces, Daraa and surrounding areas have seen occasional attacks claimed by IS militants and other extremist groups.</p> <p>Sadradeen Kinno, a Syria researcher who closely follows militant groups in the war-torn country, said the Syrian regime and its Russian allies have not cleared the south of all radical groups, including IS.</p> <p>"The security situation in Daraa and other southern parts of the country remains fragile because the Syrian regime's ability to provide post-IS stability is different from that of other players that have fought Daesh, such as the [U.S.-backed] Syrian Democratic Forces in northeast Syria," he told VOA.</p> <p>For one, Kinno said, the regime's military units in every part of Syria fall under different foreign commands, including Russia and Iran.</p> <p>"The units that are affiliated with Russia in the south have in recent months proven to be ineffective and disorganized, largely because Russia has been focused on its war in Ukraine," he said, adding that IS cells "have naturally exploited the situation to increase their presence in the south."</p>

	<p>The Syrian regime is currently not capable of pushing back IS operatives in areas that are entirely under its control, Kinno said.</p> <p>Other experts said the Syrian government could have tolerated the presence of some elements of IS to threaten the remaining rebel groups that have not reconciled with the government.</p> <p>As part of a Russian-brokered deal in 2018, the Syrian government allowed several rebel groups to remain in Daraa if they agreed to lay down their arms or fight under the regime's command. Some groups, however, kept their arms without fighting alongside government forces.</p> <p>"The Syrian regime's narrative is that all fundamentalist groups in the south have been arrested since 2018, but we keep hearing about the emergence of Daesh cells in towns across Daraa," said Hisham al-Masalmeh, a Belgium-based Syrian political analyst who hails from Daraa.</p> <p>"Every town in southern Syria is controlled by dozens of checkpoints, so it's questionable as to how these Daesh cells were able to infiltrate into any town in the area," he told VOA.</p> <p>"It's clear that the regime tries to use them against local rebel groups."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 Militants attack Burkina Faso army base
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ten-soldiers-killed-50-wounded-attack-burkina-faso-army-base-2022-10-24/
GIST	<p>OUAGADOUGOU, Oct 24 (Reuters) - At least ten soldiers were killed and about 50 wounded in a militant attack early Monday on an army base in Djibo, in northern Burkina Faso, the army said in a statement.</p> <p>Islamist militants, some with links to al Qaeda and Islamic State, have been waging an insurgency in northern Burkina Faso since 2015. The worsening violence spurred soldiers last month to overthrow the government in the second coup this year.</p> <p>"Members of the regiment responded valiantly to direct and indirect fire from the enemy, who came in large numbers," said the army statement, adding that the death toll was provisional.</p> <p>It said that at least 18 of the attackers were also killed.</p> <p>Air reinforcements have been deployed in the area to carry out relief and response operations, the army said.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	10/24 Fewer dead bug splats on car windshields?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/analysis-wait-why-are-there-so-few-dead-bugs-on-my-windshield-these-days/
GIST	<p>After a long drive, the only thing that makes our stomachs churn faster than a windshield smeared with bug guts is a windshield bearing no evidence of insect life whatsoever. It feels like a fundamental pillar of the planet's ecology has snapped.</p> <p>You've probably noticed it, too. On long summer road trips, tiny corpses once formed a crust so thick that the reduced visibility posed a legitimate safety risk. Now, many folks we spoke with can't remember the last time they had to scour the bug gore from their RAV4.</p>

Before we address possible causes of the “windshield phenomenon,” such as more aerodynamic cars, we should make one thing clear: It’s not a mass delusion or faulty collective memory. Windshield splats are valid ecological data, and they don’t bear good news.

One of the first to realize their potential, in 1996, was Anders Pape Moller, a Danish biologist with (a) the iconoclastic streak necessary to even consider using windshields as a bug-measurement device and (b) the stubbornly ferocious work ethic needed to see the scheme through.

Moller, who now works at high-ranked Paris-Saclay University, said he began studying birds – and the insects they eat – in the late 1960s. In the mid-1990s, he got it in his head that counting windshield splatters might help track difficult-to-measure insect populations. He couldn’t persuade a graduate student to take up the observations, so he hit the roads himself.

Every summer, despite serious health issues that have kept him in and out of hospitals for the past decade, he and his assistants return to Denmark to drive battered budget vehicles back and forth, hundreds of times, along the same rural routes studded with farms in the north of Denmark’s Jutland peninsula.

They keep their speed consistent. They track temperature and wind conditions. And they count the number of bug splats, large and small. They also track bug populations with more conventional entomological methods, catching them in nets and sticky traps, and counting how many insects local swallows are feeding their chicks.

It’s one of the most idiosyncratic and impressive feats of data collection we’ve seen. And Moller’s windshields establish empirically what we’ve all seen anecdotally.

From 1996 to 2017, insect splatters fell by 80 percent on one of the routes Moller regularly travels. On the other, longer stretch, they plunged 97 percent. Conventional measures show similar trends, and more recent observations have seen even sharper declines, Moller told us.

Experts say the lack of insect innards on our summer windshields is just one symptom of a broader decline in insect populations worldwide. But how much are insects declining? We’re not sure.

Insects are astonishingly widespread and astonishingly weird, and we know comparatively little about them. We’ve only got a few hundred long-term studies of their populations – typically isolated efforts by people like Moller who are sometimes interested in the insects mainly as bird food or crop pests. We know literally nothing about the vast majority of what could be as many as 10 million insect species out there.

Bugs are also just harder to measure than more widely tracked animals. Their numbers swing wildly year to year, season to season, even sometimes day to day. And while the overall trend leads inexorably downward, it’s not uncommon for individual studies to show a local insect population rising.

So, given this uncertainty, isn’t it possible that our spookily clean windshields are caused by factors other than rapidly declining insect populations? After all, we still see bugs everywhere, we just don’t seem to mash them with our cars as much.

Many smart people we spoke with, including entomologists and wheat farmers, speculated that maybe the cars have changed, not the bugs. As vehicles become more aerodynamic, the thinking goes, their increasingly efficient airflow whisks the bugs away from the windshield instead of creating head-on splatters.

But when we called experts in the arcane art of computational fluid dynamics, they sounded skeptical. Yes, today’s sleek sedans can have half the drag of the land boats that ruled the road just a generation or two ago. But that improved airflow won’t do much for a bug.

For starters, many aero improvements happen on the rear of the car rather than the bug-hitting front. Consider the optimally aerodynamic teardrop shape, with its blunt, round front and long, sleek tail. But more importantly, it's just surprisingly difficult to use air to push a bug out of the way of an onrushing Buick.

If it were possible to design a bug- and debris-proof car, then Kevin Golsch probably would have done it by now. An auto-industry veteran, Golsch has spent decades around wind tunnels, both real and simulated, and is now vice president for strategic fluid design and simulation at Altair, a global tech company that makes simulation and AI software. Altair's customers include massive automakers that would be thrilled if airflow could protect both windshields and the delicate sensors on self-driving cars.

"From an aerodynamic standpoint, I've done a lot of studies on contamination of sensors, especially for autonomous vehicles," Golsch said. "And I think most everybody's given up on trying to influence what happens at the vehicle level for dust and particles and rain."

Consider raindrops. They're about the size and weight of a larger insect, but nobody thinks fewer raindrops hit our windshields these days. Any forces that cleared our windshield of bugs would presumably do the same for rain and road debris, Golsch said.

To be sure, one element of modern auto design could be reducing bug spatter. Windshields today often have a lower slope than the more-vertical front windows of yesteryear, and while the broader shift to SUVs and trucks with bigger, steeper windshields will negate some of that, it might reduce splats for people who are driving similar vehicles.

"If the windshield was laid back slightly more than another windshield, that bug may have a chance of just skipping off and going up over the windshield rather than hitting the windshield," Golsch said. "It might be a glancing blow at the last second rather than a splat."

But we also saw 60 percent declines in insects between 2004 and 2021 in a British study from the Kent Wildlife Trust, which built on a Royal Society for the Protection of Birds effort in which thousands of people used "splatometers" to measure bug splatters on license plates, which aren't much affected by aerodynamic advances elsewhere.

So, there are fewer dead bugs regardless of aerodynamics. But we couldn't ignore the multitudes of smart people who told us they believed something had changed with automobiles.

Desperate for answers, we woke up during the Italian workday and called Matteo Aroni at Ansys, which models physics for car and aerospace firms. Aroni, an expert in calculating how air flows around cars, casually mentioned that if there is a finite number of bugs that are roughly evenly distributed, the number of bugs splattered must be a function of the area of the windshield. And suddenly, everything clicked into place.

When you strip away the other variables, what we're really measuring when we drive through the countryside is a simple fraction: Bugs per windshield.

We know the numerator, bugs, has gone down. But what about the denominator?

The number of windshields – or, more accurately, miles traveled by each square foot of windshield, since our driving habits and windshield sizes differ – has soared!

Americans now drive three times as many miles as they did in 1970, and the explosion of trucks and SUVs means many of us do it in cars with much, much larger windshields. Back-of-the-napkin math suggests acreage of windshields out on the American road has tripled. And that's probably an underestimate in some places: A large majority of our increase in driving has come on a narrow set of major urban roads, according to our analysis of Bureau of Transportation Statistics data. And as Kenny

	<p>Cornett of design-software giant Autodesk points out, more traffic means more vehicles riding in each other's bug-free aerodynamic slipstreams.</p> <p>So in our little thought experiment, which makes the depressingly accurate assumption that bugs are a finite resource, our bugs-per-windshield metric would have been cut by two-thirds even if the number of bugs had remained constant. And it hasn't! It's fallen precipitously.</p> <p>So, simple math hints that the very real ecological disaster of the collapse of insect populations may look even more apocalyptic thanks to the parallel rise of another ecological time bomb: The world's intensifying love affair with ever more and ever bigger automobiles.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 Salmon face new risk: drought, downpour
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/through-pacific-northwest-drought-and-downpour-what-will-happen-to-the-salmon/
GIST	<p>CHEHALIS — As biologist Nick Vanbuskirk drew a knife along the yellowing belly of the carcass of a Chinook salmon, hundreds of ripe, translucent orange eggs spilled out into the ankle-high waters of the Newaukum River.</p> <p>After surviving a stint in the Pacific Ocean, this salmon was met with over 70 miles of warm, shallow river. Along the way, she evaded hungry predators and made it most of the way back to her spawning grounds. But she died before she finished the job. The fish was only partially spawned out.</p> <p>“It’s related to low water,” Vanbuskirk said. “The fish is just being attacked by so much stuff as far as disease, so any additional stress lets all that just kind of take over.”</p> <p>After Western Washington saw the driest June to October on record, several storms were slated to soak the region beginning Friday. It’s a welcome sight for many, including fish stuck downstream. But it comes at the risk of scouring eggs already laid in vulnerable places throughout the Northwest.</p> <p>Extreme low river flows are just another blow to a species that’s already in crisis.</p> <p>On a good day, this freshwater highway threading through Lewis County might be flowing at 300 cubic feet per second, Vanbuskirk said. On Thursday, it was about one-tenth of that.</p> <p>As the first rain of the season began to fall Friday morning, over two dozen river gauges documented levels below the 10th percentile of the flows ever recorded on the day. A streamflow between the 25th and 75th percentiles is considered normal.</p> <p>Nearly all Western Washington rivers were near or at record low flows for weeks, following the dry spell. It prompted state, tribal and federal officials to close some fisheries, and it might have changed how fish spawn.</p> <p>“Feast or famine”</p> <p>Thursday morning just outside Stan Hedwall Park in Chehalis, a half dozen purplish-maroon male Chinook chased each other around the spawning grounds where females hovered. Their dorsal fins poked out into the hazy smoke-filled air as they raced through the shallows.</p> <p>After successfully fending off the others, one dominant male swam beside a female — marked by her whitish tail. She turned on her side and began using her body and tail to move around the rocks, making way for her eggs.</p> <p>State department of Fish and Wildlife biologists and technicians travel the river on one-person pontoons, stopping to count, tag and take notes on these egg nests, known as redds.</p>

A whiteboard inside a tan tarp tent at Fish and Wildlife's post in Rochester keeps a tally of these redds.

This week is typically considered part of the peak Chinook spawning time in the Newaukum River. But this week's column on the board is mostly a big line of zeros, punctuated by a couple of 2s. That means crews only have seen a few fish find their way into the south or north forks of the river to spawn. Instead their redds have been concentrated in the lower main stem.

Overall, Chinook redd counts are down. This week, 45 were tallied in the Newaukum. That's compared with last year's 56, and redd counts topping 100 in 2019 and 2020.

The past four years, rains have helped dozens of these fish push their way into the upper tributaries to spawn, according to the state's counts. Their redds were distributed across the river.

That distribution is important for survival.

"If you have spawning ground available throughout your watershed, you have more eggs in more baskets," said Craig Smith, harvest program manager for the Nisqually tribe.

When there's low water, Chinook are relegated to spawn in the thalweg, or the lowest part of the river, said Pete Verhey, state fisheries biologist for the Snohomish and Stillaguamish basins. They're deprived of fine gravels, and their redds are at risk of being destroyed by high water.

Maybe some of the fish are just "crossing their fins" and waiting until the rain helps move them upstream, Verhey said. Other biologists worry the rain came too late.

Across the state, coastal and inland biologists have reported fish "holding," or waiting for rain to make their dash to higher spawning grounds.

Earlier this month, thousands of Chinook were seen [waiting to get upstream in the Quillayute River](#). Others have spawned in concentrated areas downstream.

The first wave of rain starting over the weekend also has the potential to "scour," or wash out some of those unstable redds.

"It's feast or famine," Vanbuskirk said.

Biologists won't know until spring out-migration counts how these eggs fared through the drought and downpour. Right now, all they see is it's shifting how and where some salmon are spawning.

"Started getting used to this"

Washington coastal rivers continue to experience negative fluctuations in flow. Peak flows have increased, and low flows have gotten lower since 1976, according to a 2020 report by the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission.

Both trends could threaten fish.

Those low flows might be a product of increased demands on groundwater resources coupled with increasingly dry summers in Western Washington.

Bernard AfterBuffalo Jr. has watched coastal tributaries gradually warm and disappear since he started working for the Hoh Tribe in 2007.

"We've had numerous years with bad water quality for fish," he said. "We've seen a couple of streams dry out that haven't done so historically."

It was gradual, AfterBuffalo said, until a “blob” of warm water parked itself off the West Coast. The blob — driven by a long-lasting high pressure ridge — appeared in 2013. It’s part of a larger pattern that led to low snowpack, drought and depleted marine nutrient levels.

Since then, every summer has been drier and drier.

AfterBuffalo and other fisheries workers recently began a desperate effort to save stranded fish — using buckets to move them out of pools and back into connected stream habitat. It’s what he calls “Operation Free Willy.”

Like AfterBuffalo, many fisheries leaders have “started getting used to this,” Smith said.

For about a decade, the Stillaguamish basin has seen these low flows putting pressure on spawning salmon, said Jason Griffith, environmental manager for the Stillaguamish Tribe.

In response, the Stillaguamish and other regional tribes have been working to restore critical [rearing habitat](#) to try to give the young fish a better shot at survival.

But there’s plenty affecting fish that’s out of their control.

Smith, the Nisqually fisheries leader, grew up in Washington. He said he doesn’t remember back-to-back years of wildfire smoke, extreme heat events and drought.

“The tribes have been fighting to protect their treaty rights for forever,” he said. “And this is just another blow when the environment is changing because of things beyond their control. Their environment is their treaty right. Clean water and fish are part of their treaty rights. And this is just sad and frustrating.”

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HEADLINE	10/24 NASA launches new UFO study
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/nasa-ufo-study-team-announced-unidentified-aerial-phenomena-uap/
GIST	<p>A team of scientists and experts on Monday began a new study into unidentified aerial phenomena (UAP), formerly known as UFOs, NASA announced. The nine-month study will "lay the groundwork for future study on the nature of UAPs for NASA and other organizations," the space agency said.</p> <p>The team, announced on Friday, includes former astronaut Scott Kelly along with 15 other scientists and experts in fields ranging from computational data science, physics, astrophysics, astronomy, oceanography and several other disciplines. NASA had announced in June that the team would be led by David Spergel, the president of the Simons Foundation and an astrophysicist who formerly chaired Princeton University's astrophysics department.</p> <p>The study will focus exclusively on unclassified data, NASA said.</p> <p>"The team will identify how data gathered by civilian government entities, commercial data, and data from other sources can potentially be analyzed to shed light on UAPs," the agency said. "It will then recommend a roadmap for potential UAP data analysis by the agency going forward."</p> <p>NASA noted that, "without access to an extensive set of data, it is nearly impossible to verify or explain any observation, thus the focus of the study is to inform NASA what possible data could be collected in the future to scientifically discern the nature of UAP."</p> <p>A report is expected to be publicly released in mid-2023.</p> <p>"Exploring the unknown in space and the atmosphere is at the heart of who we are at NASA," said Thomas Zurbuchen, associate administrator for NASA's Science Mission Directorate. "Understanding the data we have surrounding unidentified aerial phenomena is critical to helping us draw scientific conclusions about</p>

	<p>what is happening in our skies. Data is the language of scientists and makes the unexplainable, explainable."</p> <p>The effort is separate from the work of a Defense Department group that has been investigating UAP incidents reported by aviators for several years, but NASA noted in June that the agency has "coordinated widely across the government regarding how to apply the tools of science to shed light on the nature and origin of unidentified aerial phenomena."</p> <p>The number of reported encounters with UAPs has exploded in recent years as the military has encouraged pilots to document their experiences, citing possible national security threats. The incidents acknowledged publicly typically involve strange objects zooming at high speeds across vast distances, with no apparent propulsion system.</p> <p>A report by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) and the Pentagon's UAP Task Force issued last year found no evidence to suggest the objects originated from a foreign adversary or were extraterrestrial in nature, but investigators also could not explain most of the incidents.</p> <p>Pentagon officials working to identify the origins of UAPs testified in May before a House subcommittee in the first public hearing on the matter in more than 50 years. They told lawmakers the number of reported encounters had grown to about 400 over nearly 20 years, with 11 "near-misses" between the objects and military jets.</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	10/24 El Salvador's gang crackdown
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/world/prison-deaths-mount-in-el-salvadors-gang-crackdown-2/
GIST	<p>SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — Jesús Joya says his brother was "special" — at 45, he was childlike, eager to please. He was as far from a gang member as anyone could be. And yet the last time he saw Henry, he was boarding a bus to prison.</p> <p>"Henry, you're going to get out," Jesús shouted. "You haven't done anything wrong."</p> <p>From his seat, Henry responded with a small wave. A police officer smacked him in the head.</p> <p>Three weeks before, on March 26, El Salvador's street gangs had killed 62 people across the country, igniting a nationwide furor. President Nayib Bukele and his allies in congress launched a war against the gangs and suspended constitutional rights.</p> <p>Nearly seven months later, this "state of exception" is still widely popular. But gangsters are not the only ones caught up in a dragnet that has been haphazard, with fatal consequences.</p> <p>The arrests of more than 55,000 people have swamped an already overwhelmed criminal justice system.</p> <p>Defendants arrested on the thinnest of suspicions are dying in prison before any authority looks closely at their cases. At least 80 people arrested under the state of exception have succumbed without being convicted of anything, according to a network of non-governmental organizations trying to track them. The government has provided no figures.</p> <p>Life in the prisons is brutal; the Bukele administration turned down AP requests to visit them. Defendants disappear into the system, leaving families to track them down. A month after Henry's arrest, guards at the Mariona prison north of San Salvador told Jesús that Henry was no longer there. That's all they would say.</p>

A local newspaper photographer had captured the image of Henry, already dressed in prison whites, spotting Jesús in the crowd as he was taken away. For more than two months, Jesús carried a clipping of that photo to every prison in El Salvador, and then to every hospital.

Have you seen this man, he asked. Have you seen my brother?

When police and soldiers fanned out across El Salvador to make their arrests earlier this year, Bukele tweeted the daily number of “terrorists” detained and talked tough about making their lives miserable.

Police and soldiers encircled neighborhoods or towns, set up checkpoints and searched door to door. They grabbed people standing in the street, commuting to work, at their jobs, in their homes. Sometimes it was a tattoo that got their attention, a picture in someone’s cell phone. Sometimes, they carried lists of names, people who had prior records or brushes with the law. They encouraged anonymous tipsters to drop a dime on gang members or their collaborators.

Some police commanders imposed arrest quotas and encouraged officers to massage details.

It quickly became apparent that the president’s plan did not extend beyond making mass arrests.

Lawmakers bought time by suspending arrestees’ access to lawyers, extending from three days to 15 days the period someone could be held without charges and lifting the cap for how long someone could be held before trial. Judges almost automatically sent those arrested to prison for six months while prosecutors tried to build cases.

Judges are under tremendous pressure to go along with the president’s goals to protect their jobs, said Sidney Blanco Reyes, a judge forced to retire after a legislative reform established an age cap last year. “It’s as though the fate of those locked up depends on what the president says.”

By the government’s own account, El Salvador’s prisons were already overcrowded before the war against the gangs. The president quickly announced the construction of a new mega prison, but it remains unfinished. Seven months later, El Salvador’s incarcerated population has more than doubled.

Generally, the deaths stem from unattended injuries sustained in beatings during their capture, chronic illnesses for which prisoners do not receive treatment, aggression from other inmates or deplorable sanitary conditions, said Zaira Navas, a lawyer with the non-governmental organization Cristosal.

“There is interest in hiding these deaths,” said Navas, and so they are blamed on natural causes.

Guillermo Gallegos, a vice president in El Salvador’s Legislative Assembly, concedes mistakes have been made and said it was a “tragedy” when they occur. But he sees no reason to lift the state of exception anytime soon.

He attributed the prison deaths to rivalries between jailed gang members. He raised doubts about claims of arbitrary detentions. It is very hard, he said, for a mother to admit her son was a gang member or collaborated with them.

Gallegos said he expected the state of exception will continue for another six months — long enough, he said, to lock up all the 30,000 gang members he believes remain at large.

They should be kept behind bars for as long as possible, said Gallegos, who is also a proponent of the death penalty. “They can’t be rehabilitated, there’s no reinsertion.”

Henry Joya lived in a single room in Luz, a San Salvador neighborhood notorious for its gangs. Henry and Jesús had been there for some 35 years, and Henry was a well-known figure, polite and friendly. Neighbors would give him small sums for taking out their trash and cleaning their yards.

Jesús Joya paid \$50 a month for Henry's room in a modest boardinghouse on a narrow alley where he said he made sure there were no gang members.

Two days before Henry's arrest, Jesús had talked to him about the state of exception and warned him to stay inside. "Be really careful, go to bed early," Jesús said. Henry said he would only go to work.

A neighbor, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of attracting police attention, said he heard three loud knocks on the door to Henry's building on the night of April 19. On the fourth, someone shouted "Police!"

The neighbor glimpsed police and soldiers. Henry did not put up any resistance and the neighbor heard him say nothing as he was led away.

By the time Jesús ran up the hill from his house, the police and Henry were gone.

Jesús' search for his brother ended in September. He forced himself to go to the morgue and give the clerks his brother's name: Henry Eleazar Joya Jovel.

They found that a Henry Cuellar Jovel had died in the Mariona prison on May 25, barely a month after Henry had waved from the bus. The government had buried this man in a common grave on July 8.

Jesús asked to see photographs of the body, and his worst fears were confirmed.

The official cause of death? Pulmonary edema.

Jesús Joya worked to correct his brother's name, which he believes was misrendered by authorities to obscure his death. He convinced the government to exhume Henry's body so that he could be buried where their grandparents lived, but first he brought the casket back to his neighborhood, so all of Henry's friends could say goodbye.

The prison "had my phone number," he said. "They never told me: 'Look, your brother is sick; look, this happened to your brother.'"

"He was in good health," he said. "The only thing wrong was his head."

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HEADLINE	10/24 Homeless camps 20% Seattle shots-fired
SOURCE	https://www.bigcountrynewsconnection.com/news/state/washington/nearly-20-of-seattle-shootings-happened-near-homeless-encampments/article_b3bc8e70-46d1-5503-9a74-32f6a40165ac.html
GIST	<p>(The Center Square) – Data released by the city of Seattle reveals that homeless encampments saw a good percentage of shots fired in 2022.</p> <p>According to the latest update from the One Seattle Homelessness Action Plan, nearly 20% of all citywide shootings/shots fired through September were connected to an unauthorized encampment or a homeless person.</p> <p>Out of 573 reports of shootings and shots fired, the city states that 101 reports were in connection to homelessness. That represents about 18% of total cases being near encampments throughout Seattle.</p> <p>Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell's office said in a statement that the 101 reports represent an average of three shots fired per week in connection to homeless camps.</p> <p>The King County Regional Homelessness Authority's "Partnership for Zero Campaign" is a collaboration of city officials to find solutions to homelessness. Its initial focus is in Downtown Seattle and the Chinatown International-District.</p>

Felicia Salcedo, the executive director of We Are In, [previously stated](#) that the two districts represent the largest concentration of the homeless in King County.

Out of the 573 reports of shootings and shots fired through the first nine months of the year, 61 occurred in the Downtown and Chinatown districts combined, according to the [Seattle Police Department's crime dashboard](#). That represents 10% of the total number of cases of shootings and shots fired throughout the city.

Earlier in October, Seattle announced an emergency operations center was up and running. It is located in the heart of the Chinatown District where tents are visibly prominent.

Marc Dones, the CEO of the authority, said the command center has already identified over 300 units of available housing and to date has engaged with over 650 people in need.

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HEADLINE	10/25 Climate activists jailed: 'not going to deter'
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/y3pxey/just-stop-oil-protesters-interview
GIST	<p>For most of us, doing our bit for the climate means giving up meat, remembering to take the recycling out and avoiding shrink-wrapped cucumbers at the supermarket. But for some young people, it's meant temporarily giving up their freedom – jeopardising their careers, studies, finances and relationships in the process.</p> <p>Dozens of UK climate protesters have been handed prison sentences over acts including blocking roads and oil terminals, damaging property and breaking injunctions. Edred Whittingham was one of 51 Just Stop Oil supporters sent to prison in a single day in September, after they gathered at Kingsbury Oil Terminal in defiance of a high court injunction that banned them from the site.</p> <p>The 25-year-old, who is currently studying PPE at Exeter University, said of his week locked up in HMP Birmingham: “On the whole, it was not fun, but it was perfectly tolerable.” Stuck in a cell without his own books to read (“unfortunately you can’t take them in yourself, they’re worried people will smuggle in drugs on the paper”) he ended up watching the whole of the Queen’s funeral on the TV.</p> <p>“It’s something to do, isn’t it!” he says, adding that the boredom didn’t bother him too much. “I’m a very self-sufficient and – for lack of a better term – spiritually-minded person, so just being in a room for a long period of time with no external stimulus can actually be an interesting time for reflection.”</p> <p>Whittingham first ventured into climate action when he joined Extinction Rebellion in 2019, but he didn’t find his niche in the movement until Just Stop Oil emerged earlier this year. “I saw within them the perfect articulation of climate activism, namely – we’re going to do what’s necessary and they can stick us in jail but we’ve got our aim, we’ve got our strategy, we’re just going to do it,” he says. “I thought, yeah, this is the movement I’ve been waiting for.”</p> <p>The group – whose single demand is that the government commits to ending all new licences and permissions for fossil fuel projects – has engaged in sustained high-profile action during October, from blocking the Dartford Crossing to chucking tomato soup over a Van Gogh painting, pouring mashed potato over a Monet (both artworks are protected by glass and were undamaged) and throwing cake at a waxwork of King Charles. As of October 24th, Just Stop Oil protesters have been arrested 1,880 times since April, while seven supporters are currently in prison.</p> <p>While Just Stop Oil’s methods have been criticised, they’ve succeeded in generating almost daily headlines and drawing attention to their cause. But at what cost to the protesters themselves?</p> <p>“We could see serious stress on our civilization within years or decades...If what I’m doing in any way helps to prevent or slow that down, I’m not worried about the impact to me personally,” says Whittingham, who is currently a student. “A lot of people can’t do what I did because they want to work</p>

with children or in the NHS or something that requires a clean record, but I'm not in that position so the employment thing doesn't concern me too much."

Jade Calland, 29, was jailed the same day as Edred as part of the Just Stop Oil action and sent to HMP Bronzefield for nine days. "Honestly, it was completely bizarre," she says. "The whole experience was very surreal."

"I can imagine if you were in there for a bit longer it could be quite traumatising or life changing, because you kind of get into that prison routine. Just for those nine days, it was like a strange fever dream."

Calland was locked in her cell for 23 hours a day and says getting into Sudoku helped pass the time. "I'd never done one before, but I was bored to tears if I'm being honest, it was very tedious." The freelance blockchain consultant only got involved in [climate activism](#) in mid-July as a result of the cost of living crisis, after several years living in Thailand with her partner.

"When we got back to the UK everything was just double the price. With the energy bills hike and all the stuff around that, we were just ready to do something," she tells VICE. "It's kind of zero to 100 in two seconds, to end up in prison."

Is she concerned about the impact on her future and career? "A little bit, yeah," says Calland. "I'm in my 20s so I do have a long future career ahead of me. A lot of the activists that went to prison are retired... There's a reason that the older generation gets involved with this high-risk kind of stuff."

But, like Whittingham, she says the climate crisis is a more pressing concern. "Am I really going to be concerned about having a criminal record or what my career path is going to look like in severe drought, severe famines and mass migrations?"

By her own admission, a lot of climate activism is "sitting around" – on the road, in court, in a police cell, in prison. Does she ever wish she was spending her youth getting wasted and having fun instead? "I'm not going to lie, I've had a lot of fun in my 20s," she says. "But it's not fulfilling. You can't get any long term happiness from that when you feel a bit hopeless about the future."

"I think taking action when you feel afraid or worried or anxious, that actually does make you feel a lot better... I feel like I couldn't be doing anything else."

Louis McKechnie has been imprisoned at HMP Altcourse since early July after breaching a court bail and is likely to be there until he faces trial in February for a public nuisance charge.

Due to what he describes as "prison admin", VICE wasn't able to speak to him directly – instead, his father read out our questions on one of their regular calls and passed on his answers.

The 21-year-old, who has been involved with Extinction Rebellion, Insulate Britain and Just Stop Oil, says life in prison so far "isn't how the media portrays it".

"I wake up every morning and exercise in the yard and I spend an hour or two socialising with my neighbours who show me kindness and care," he says. "I spend most of my days reading and watching TV, and play pool and snooker with my friends on the wing. The vegan food is pretty good and the culture is jovial and positive."

He misses seeing family and friends – and he *really* misses hummus – but overall he finds it "very manageable". "The only major problem is boredom," he says.

McKechnie says his activism has already seen him kicked out of university, though he feels its a "worthwhile trade-off" considering the "countless lives" at risk from climate breakdown. And he says being in jail has given him valuable time for reflection and growth.

All three young people VICE spoke to said they were lucky to have family and friends that supported their efforts. “Many of them have said they have been inspired to take further action themselves... after seeing me locked up,” says McKechnie.

Yet future protesters could find themselves at even greater risk of imprisonment, if the government succeeds in passing its controversial Public Order Bill. Explicitly targeted at protesters, former Home Secretary Priti Patel [said](#) the bill would allow police to take “proactive action” against “anti-social protests” and “prevent such disruption happening in the first place”.

It would make “locking-on” – using devices like bike locks or chains to attach yourself to buildings, objects or other people – and interfering with key national infrastructure criminal offences, and introduce Serious Disruption Prevention Orders – which could stop individuals from being in certain places, associating with certain people and even using the internet in particular ways.

Jun Pang, the policy and campaigns officer at [Liberty](#), told VICE these “draconian measures” could “criminalise anyone attempting to make themselves heard”.

“In a functioning democracy, everyone must be able to stand up to power, but the Government’s new measures will have a chilling effect on everyone’s right to protest,” she says.

Whittingham says that the provisions in the bill were “absolutely outrageous”, but notes: “The fact that [the government] is taking the time to do that means that movements like ours are effective, because if they weren’t effective they wouldn’t waste their time with it.”

And, he adds: “It’s not going to deter any of us.”

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HEADLINE	10/24 On the trail of mass-school-shooting hoaxer
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/school-swatting-textnow-ethiopia/
GIST	<p>FOUR TIMES IN the past year, the parents, teachers, and police officers of the small, neighboring Minnesota cities of Cloquet and Esko briefly believed that their children were about to be murdered in their classrooms. The calls began in the spring with two bomb threats. In the first, a man claimed to have seen a suspicious backpack with wires coming out of it at Cloquet and Esko high school. In July, he called again, this time reporting a bomb in a red backpack at Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College, according to police records. Then, in September, the same man, described by the Midwestern dispatchers as having a thick Middle Eastern accent, reported that a pair of gunmen, armed with AK-47s, had killed 10 people at Cloquet High School.</p> <p>All of these calls turned out to be hoaxes. But according to Derrick Randall, Cloquet’s chief of police, each time they came in, it was “all hands on deck” for his department. Officers sprinted to their squad cars, threw on their extra body armor, and chambered rounds in the squad rifles. They may have blasted through stop signs and traffic signals while racing as fast as they could to face what might have been the worst thing they would ever see in their lives. “It’s dangerous, frustrating. It’s a waste, and we feel helpless,” says Randall. “Our job is to hold people accountable, and when there’s a person or group on the other side of the world able to take advantage of us and exploit our systems like this, they are taking away our power and control.”</p> <p>According to the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, at least 26 schools in the state have received false reports of bomb threats or active shootings from the same individual or group since spring. The calls are part of an ongoing spree of hoax calls that police say are likely coming from overseas and have sent hundreds of thousands of students nationwide into lockdown. According to police records WIRED obtained, the hoax caller began their spree in March, earlier than previously reported, and could be linked to bomb threats called into dozens of colleges during the summer. Earlier this month, WIRED tracked more than 90 false reports of active shooters made to K-12 schools in 16 states around the country during the second half of September, and NPR found that the number may be even higher. The calls haven’t</p>

stopped. Scores of schools in [New Jersey](#), [Florida](#), [California](#), [South Carolina](#), [South Dakota](#), [Wisconsin](#), and [Connecticut](#) have been targeted in the past three weeks.

“The biggest frustration amongst parents is why no one can do anything to stop it,” says Hayley Katchenske, whose job includes sending messages to parents when there's an emergency at Cloquet Public Schools. “Why did it happen to us again, why can't this be traced, and why can't it be stopped?”

State and federal law enforcement are working to answer these questions. They believe they know how the person carried out these dangerous hoax calls, WIRED has found. But they have yet to discover who is behind this string of attacks and, crucially, why they are doing them. The answers will determine what, if anything, law enforcement can do to stop it.

TextNow, Investigate Later

In an October memo the FBI sent to schools in New York that WIRED obtained, the agency describes a single subject—a male “with a heavy accent described as Middle Eastern or African”—behind many of these hoax calls. Federal and local law enforcement in several states say that the caller appears to be located internationally, perhaps in Ethiopia, and is using VoIP technology to systematically call in threats to targeted schools.

WIRED traced six phone numbers used in the hoax calls to a service called [TextNow](#), a platform that allows users to anonymously place calls using US phone numbers. Unlike with traditional cellular service, where a provider might need a credit card and address to sign up for service, TextNow customers need to provide only an email address to begin making calls. That drastically limits the information the company is able to provide to law enforcement.

According to the October FBI memo, TextNow has provided investigators with subscriber information. The memo also says that an email account behind at least one of the hoax calls was linked to previous hoax 911 calls and that the account had connected to TextNow through the Ethiopian Telecommunications Company, which is owned by the Ethiopian government.

Nick de Pass, a spokesperson for TextNow, declined to comment on “ongoing investigations.” But in a statement, he says the company has not only banned all the accounts associated with the calls but any users in Ethiopia. “We have also added Ethiopia to our list of unsupported countries to help eliminate this activity from our platform, which means that all calling and texting from the country has been banned from our service,” de Pass says.

But just because the caller connected to TextNow with an Ethiopian IP address doesn't mean the caller is in Ethiopia. James Turgal, a former executive assistant director for the FBI Information and Technology Branch who is now the vice president of cyber risk and strategy at [Optiv Security](#), says an IP address isn't the most trustworthy of signals. He pointed out that if the caller was using a VPN or Tor, the Ethiopian IP address that TextNow gave the FBI might not be the origin of the call, but simply as far back as they could currently trace it. “There are mechanisms to investigate whether or not the caller was using a VPN, but it's labor-intensive, time-consuming, and is sometimes classified,” Turgal says. ([TextNow claims to not allow users to connect via VPN.](#))

The more pressing question for Turgal is motivation. “The fact that no one has taken credit leads me to believe that this isn't just kids on Twitch,” he says. “Is it political, is it anti-police, is it because of Uvalde? This is just so wide-reaching that you have to do a behavioral analysis here. What's the end game here, and what are their motivations?”

WIRED used TextNow to contact six numbers associated with recent false reports, which were obtained either through law enforcement officials or public records requests. We left voicemails and texted each number multiple times, asking what their motivations were for the hoax calls. On October 14, a phone number associated with a hoax call in Ohio responded, saying, “FUCK YOU UNITED STATES OF FUCKING AMERICA.” A minute later adding, “FUCK YOU, FUCK YOU.” The message was sent the same morning that at least eight districts across New Jersey were put into lockdown due to hoax calls. On

October 20, a number used in a swatting call in Minnesota responded with the exact same message. An hour prior to the October 20 correspondence, at least 14 schools in Wisconsin had been targeted by the hoax caller.

Driving Force

Without clear evidence of motivation, officials are grasping at straws—and terrorism is one that several latched onto. Officials in Cloquet speculated that the attacks could be related to the town's paper mill or nearby hydroelectric dams. A state law enforcement agent not authorized to speak with WIRED suggested that Russians could be behind the attacks, pointing out that Russia [allegedly placed thousands of fake bomb threats against schools and critical infrastructure](#) in Ukraine ahead of its February invasion. In September, Lieutenant Lane Windham of the Alexandria Police Department in Louisiana told WIRED simply, "It's terrorism."

According to federal prosecutors, however, just because an individual is terrorizing a community doesn't necessarily mean they are committing a "terrorist act" under the law—a crucial distinction. If a crime is found to be an act of terrorism, it has implications not just for the potential charges the hoax caller could face but also for how the FBI is able to investigate the calls in the first place.

Anthony Mattivi, a former federal prosecutor who served as the antiterrorism and national security coordinator for the District of Kansas, says that, for a person to be charged with a crime related to terrorism, the individual or group behind the call needs to be acting on behalf of a designated terrorist group like Al-Shabbab or ISIL, or they need to have indicated that they had an explicitly political motivation. Vulgar chat messages denouncing the United States aren't enough. "No matter how much these guys are terrorizing their victims, I haven't heard anything so far that indicates that the political element is met in these calls," Mattivi says.

If the investigation does turn into one about terrorism or national security, Mattivi says, the FBI would likely be able to utilize more advanced surveillance techniques that could help to trace these hoax calls to their source. While Mattivi declined to comment on the specifics of the tools, he is likely referring to the kinds of surveillance that can be authorized only by the United States Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, a secretive federal body that approves surveillance orders in cases involving national security that [Edward Snowden](#) made famous through his leak of NSA documents in 2013. The FBI declined WIRED's request to comment about whether the hoax calls are being investigated as terrorism.

Even if the FBI is able to identify the caller, US law enforcement's ability to apprehend them could largely be determined by where they are located. "It's not a simple situation if the caller is abroad," says Stephen McAllister, another former federal prosecutor who has worked on scores of swatting cases. He says the ability to arrest the caller hinges on whether the US has an extradition treaty with the perpetrator's country of origin or whether officials in that country will otherwise work with the US. "Maybe we could consider bringing charges just as a signal to try and deter their behavior if we can't physically get them," he says. "But who knows whether that would work."

In the meantime, that leaves millions of students vulnerable to even more lockdowns due to these hoax calls. Don Beeler is the CEO of [TDR Technology Solutions](#), a company that builds a suite of school surveillance tools that are primarily meant to mitigate false reports of threats at schools. One of their products is called the School Access Manager, software that claims to use artificial intelligence to filter out phoned-in bomb threats. Beeler provided WIRED with a report his company put out that estimates that more than 1 million students were affected by hoax calls from August 1 until October 6 this year. The hoax calls, his report claims, have cost taxpayers more than \$31 million in lost instructional time. "We try to quantify the costs of each hoax call for a school, but the reality is that this is only part of the picture," Beeler says. "This doesn't even include the psychological costs to these kids."

Officials in Cloquet talk about the possibility of more hoax calls as if they are inevitable. "We know these calls are coming in, and nothing has changed," Randall says. "So what are the things that we can do to make this less traumatic for everyone?" Most officials declined to detail their work to mitigate future hoax calls out of concerns for public safety. However, Cloquet has at least one plan.

	<p>“We prepared ourselves this year with scripts for every safety scenario that could come up,” says Katchinske, the administrator who works at Cloquet Public Schools. “Shooters, bomb threats, gas leaks, you name it. We probably have 20 scripts we’ve written out, so when the emergency happens we are at least prepared to communicate with parents.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 St Louis school shooting: 2 dead, 7 injured
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/24/us/st-louis-high-school-shooting.html?searchResultPosition=2
GIST	<p>ST. LOUIS — Messiah Miller was sitting in algebra class on Monday morning when he heard the first gunshot. Maybe it was just noise from the construction site across the street, he and his classmates reassured themselves.</p> <p>Then they heard an urgent message from the principal over the intercom: “Miles Davis is in the building.”</p> <p>That is the code that informs students and teachers at Central Visual and Performing Arts High School that an “active shooter” had breached the building; it sent students in the algebra class scrambling to hide. Messiah texted five people, including his mother, to tell them that he loved them.</p> <p>“We heard more shots, and they were getting closer and closer,” said Messiah, 16. “Then he jiggled our door. But he didn’t come in.”</p> <p>At least two people in the school were killed and seven others injured before the gunman was killed in a shootout with the police, the authorities said, as another American school transformed on Monday from a quiet place of learning to a scene of terror, panic and violence. Students cowered under desks or jumped out windows and wondered if they were going to survive.</p> <p>Lt. Col. Michael Sack, the interim commissioner of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, said the victims included a 61-year-old woman who died at a hospital after the shooting and a 16-year-old girl who was pronounced dead at the scene. Others who were hurt “suffered a variety of injuries,” including gunshot wounds, Colonel Sack said.</p> <p>The suspect, identified by the police as a former student, also died at a hospital, Colonel Sack said.</p> <p>“Here is a safe place where kids go to grow, to learn, to develop, and something like this happens — it’s just heartbreaking,” he said of the school.</p> <p>Once they were evacuated from the building, students were taken to the parking lot of a nearby grocery store to be reunited with their parents.</p> <p>In the aftermath of the shooting, police officers stood outside the school in south St. Louis, and yellow police tape lined one side of the building. Women sat on a bench, holding hands and praying for the victims.</p> <p>“Police responded quite heavily and quite quickly” to reports of a shooting just after 9 a.m., said Lori Willis, a spokeswoman for the St. Louis Public Schools, who added that seven safety officers employed by the school district were already in the building at the time of the shooting. Colonel Sack of the Police Department said that not all of them were armed. Photos published by local news outlets and shared on social media showed dozens of police cars at the busy intersection outside the school.</p> <p>The performing arts school shares a campus with another high school, the Collegiate School of Medicine and Bioscience, and both were on lockdown on Monday morning. The police identified the gunman as Orlando Harris, 19, who attended the school until last year. It was not immediately clear how Mr. Harris, who the police said had no criminal history, was able to enter the school. Colonel Sack said the building was locked, with doors secured, before Mr. Harris, who was “armed with a long gun,” arrived.</p>

Police officers responded to the school several minutes after 911 calls were placed from the school and they entered the building quickly, Colonel Sack said at a news conference on Monday evening.

“There was no sidewalk conference,” Colonel Sack said. “They just went right in.”

Colonel Sack said that officers engaged the suspect eight minutes after arriving at the scene. The gunman had a dozen 30-round high capacity magazines with him, Colonel Sack added. “This could have been much worse,” he said. “That’s a whole lot of victims.”

Kelvin Adams, the superintendent of schools for the St. Louis Public School District, credited members of the school’s faculty and staff for rallying the students to evacuate the building quickly.

Kristie Faulstich was in the middle of teaching a lesson on trade and empires to her sophomore world history class when she heard the “Miles Davis” code for an active shooter over the intercom. She said she quickly locked her classroom door, turned off the lights and instructed her class of about 20 students to move to the corner of the room.

Within a minute of her locking the classroom, Ms. Faulstich heard someone “pulling drastically” at the door and trying to get in. The person couldn’t, and moved on.

Ms. Faulstich, who said she had served in the Army until 2018, said that at one point she heard about 20 rounds fired. In the moment, Ms. Faulstich said, she was “mentally preparing for how to defend my kids.”

“I wasn’t going to say, ‘Nobody is going to hurt you,’ because that’s a promise I couldn’t make,” she said. “You get into this head space: I will do whatever it takes, and I will protect you however I have to. I know that’s how the teachers were in this moment. Those are our kids.”

Karine Jean-Pierre, the White House press secretary, condemned the shooting on Monday in a briefing with reporters, calling it “senseless violence,” and repeated President Biden’s call for Congress to pass a ban on assault weapons and other measures meant to restrict access to firearms. “We need additional action to stop the scourge of gun violence,” she said.

At a news conference outside the school, Mayor Tishaura O. Jones of St. Louis expressed sympathy for the shooting victims and survivors. “To be here for a such a devastating and traumatic situation breaks my heart, especially as a mother,” the mayor said.

The Central Visual and Performing Arts High School, with an enrollment of about 380, and the Collegiate School of Medicine and Bioscience, which has about 260 students, are magnet high schools. At the performing arts school, which has a predominantly Black student body, students are required to audition before they are accepted to enroll.

Jawae Bronner, 15, was returning from the bathroom to his visual arts class when the “Miles Davis” notification came over the intercom. His teacher ushered him and about 20 other students into a closet.

“We’re all thinking it’s a drill,” Jawae said. When he got into the closet, Jawae texted his family to let them know that he was safe. Some of his classmates started panicking, he said. They could hear gunshots nearby, but they kept waiting.

“I felt empty, I felt really empty, I had zero emotions going through me,” he said. “I was ready to die.”

While in the closet, Jawae read a verse from the Bible from his phone, John 3:16.

“I understood that if this is my time to go, this is my time to go,” he said. He began looking around the closet for possible escape routes, including a vent. He even considered braiding blankets together to create a rope that he could hang out of a window.

	Eventually, the police banged on the door and escorted Jawaee and his classmates out of the school to safety.
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HEADLINE	10/24 DOJ: 2 China officials spied for Huawei
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/24/us/politics/justice-dept-huawei.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Justice Department announced on Monday that it had indicted two Chinese intelligence officials who are believed to have unsuccessfully tried to obtain inside information about a federal investigation into a Chinese telecommunications company accused of stealing trade secrets, which people familiar with the situation later identified as Huawei Technologies.</p> <p>The Chinese intelligence officials, Guochun He and Zheng Wang, paid bribes to an official with access to sensitive details of the investigation into Huawei by the U.S. attorney in the Eastern District of New York, according to charging documents unsealed on Monday. The person turned out to be an agent working for the F.B.I. who handed over phony documents.</p> <p>The indictment was part of three unrelated legal actions against Chinese operatives in the United States that senior law enforcement officials announced on Monday, a day after President Xi Jinping of China solidified his grip on power as the Communist Party congress in Beijing closed.</p> <p>Attorney General Merrick B. Garland and Christopher A. Wray, the director of the F.B.I., issued blunt denunciations of China during a news conference, accusing the country’s leaders of meddling in the American judicial system, stealing technology and bullying Chinese citizens who emigrate to the United States.</p> <p>“The government of China sought to interfere with the rights and freedoms of individuals in the United States and to undermine our judicial system that protects those rights,” Mr. Garland told reporters. “We will continue to fiercely protect the rights guaranteed to everyone in our country.”</p> <p>Mr. Wray said the cases, which total 13 indictments and two arrests, “highlight the threat” that China’s intelligence services pose to “rights of people in the United States.”</p> <p>The bureau has identified 10 of the 13 people charged as intelligence agents, and will continue to focus on rooting out other Chinese agents, he said.</p> <p>The cases could cast a shadow over an effort by the Biden administration and TikTok to resolve national security concerns posed by the Chinese-owned video app. A draft agreement between the two parties has faced some skepticism among some administration officials, including Deputy Attorney General Lisa O. Monaco — who said the new allegations involving Huawei should serve as a warning to U.S. officials.</p> <p>“This case exposes the interconnection between intelligence officers and Chinese companies, and it demonstrates once again why such companies especially in the telecommunications industry shouldn’t be trusted to securely handle our sensitive personal data and communications,” Ms. Monaco said on Monday.</p> <p>In the Huawei case unsealed in Brooklyn federal court, the two Chinese intelligence operatives contacted an official with knowledge of the department’s investigation into Huawei in 2019, asking for documents, including trial evidence and witness lists, as well as summaries of confidential strategy meetings. Neither operative is in custody.</p> <p>They did not know the official was working with the F.B.I.</p> <p>Since that time, they have paid the official \$41,000 in Bitcoin in exchange for what they believed to be inside information on the case. Instead, the F.B.I.’s double agent sent them a phony document, marked “Secret,” which contained publicly available information.</p>

Mr. He responded by telling the official, who was not identified, that the company was “obviously interested” in receiving more stolen material, according to court documents.

A Huawei representative did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Huawei has been a persistent target of the United States government since the administration of President Donald J. Trump, which worried that the company could give Beijing access to sensitive information that travels over telecommunications networks. And the government’s efforts are part of a larger push to limit China’s influence over American consumers.

In February 2020, the Justice Department [indicted Huawei](#), the world’s largest telecommunications equipment manufacturer, and two U.S. subsidiaries, over the company’s [use of “fraud and deception”](#) to obtain sophisticated technology from U.S. companies.

Top American officials told allies around the world that they should exclude the Chinese company’s equipment from their next-generation wireless networks. The Commerce Department blacklisted the company in a bid to cut off its access to key American supplies for its products.

Congress has provided money to reimburse American telecom operators who stop using equipment made by Chinese companies like Huawei.

The Federal Communications Commission is also expected to vote soon on a measure to ban new Huawei products from being sold in the United States. It already blocks companies from spending federal subsidies on the gear.

The government has also sought to rein in the influence of other Chinese companies.

The Trump administration forced a Chinese company to sell Grindr, the dating app. It also tried to ban the viral video app TikTok unless its Chinese parent company sold a share of the app to an American company.

Also on Monday, the Justice Department unsealed an indictment in Brooklyn charging seven people with engaging in a multiyear harassment campaign to force an unnamed U.S. resident to return to China as part of a repatriation effort known as Operation Fox Hunt.

Two of those charged, Quanzhong An, 55, and Guangyang An, 34, both of Roslyn, N.Y., were arrested; the others remain at large, according to the department.

In another case unsealed on Monday, the U.S. attorney in the District of New Jersey charged four people, including three Chinese intelligence officers, with recruiting agents while working under the cover of an academic institute, according to the charging documents.

None of them are in U.S. custody.

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HEADLINE	10/24 Man sold gun in synagogue standoff jailed
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/24/us/texas-hostage-gun-sale.html
GIST	<p>The man who sold a gun to a British national who used the weapon to take four people hostage at a Texas synagogue in January was sentenced on Monday to nearly eight years in prison, the Justice Department said.</p> <p>The man, Henry Dwight Williams, 33, who had previously been convicted of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, pleaded guilty in June to being a felon in possession of a firearm in U.S. District Court in the Northern District of Texas, prosecutors said.</p>

Mr. Williams sold the pistol to Malik Faisal Akram two days before [Mr. Akram used it to take four people hostage](#) inside Congregation Beth Israel of Colleyville, a Fort Worth suburb, on Jan. 15, the Justice Department said. Mr. Akram, 44, was killed by an F.B.I. hostage-and-rescue team after a harrowing 11-hour ordeal, during which one hostage was released and the three others escaped unharmed.

Chad Meacham, the U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Texas, said in a statement on Monday that “this defendant, a convicted felon, had no business carrying — much less buying and selling — firearms.”

“Whether he suspected his buyer would use the gun to menace a community of faith is legally irrelevant,” he added. “In the U.S., convicted felons cannot possess firearms.”

Suzy Vanegas, a lawyer who represented Mr. Williams, did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment on Monday.

The standoff prompted about 200 local, state and federal law enforcement officers to converge on the synagogue, capturing the nation’s attention over what President Biden described as “an act of terror.”

Federal prosecutors said they had tied Mr. Williams to Mr. Akram, who lived in Blackburn in northern England, through an analysis of cellphone records showing that the two had exchanged calls in the days before the hostage situation.

The Dallas Police Department arrested Mr. Williams on Jan. 24 on an outstanding warrant and further questioned him, according to the complaint.

Mr. Williams confirmed that he had sold the gun to Mr. Akram at an intersection in south Dallas, prosecutors said.

On Jan. 11, 2022, Mr. Williams was in contact with Mr. Akram, who was seeking to purchase a gun, according to a criminal complaint.

Mr. Williams told F.B.I. agents that he had recalled meeting “a man with a British accent” but did not know that person’s name, the complaint states.

Mr. Williams said that he sold the gun, which was manufactured in Brazil, to Mr. Akram for \$150 on Jan. 13, according to the complaint. Mr. Akram told Mr. Williams that it would be used “for intimidation” as means to “get money” from someone who had an outstanding debt with him, the complaint states.

Mr. Akram [had been “a subject of interest” on a security watch list maintained by MI5](#), Britain’s domestic counterintelligence service. An investigation by the agency in 2020 concluded that Mr. Akram was not a terrorist threat at that time.

Mr. Akram traveled to the United States before the New Year. His brother Gulbar Akram [described him as a deeply troubled man](#) with mental health issues.

During the standoff at Congregation Beth Israel, Mr. Akram had referred to [Aafia Siddiqui](#), a Pakistani neuroscientist who was sentenced to 86 years in prison in 2010 for trying to kill American military officers in Afghanistan.

Experts have said that opposition to Ms. Siddiqui’s imprisonment has become a cause cited by jihadist militants in several countries. She is serving her sentence at a prison in Fort Worth, 24 miles from the synagogue that Mr. Akram targeted.

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HEADLINE	10/24 Ex-cop guilty plea in George Floyd death
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/24/us/george-floyd-officer-kueng-thao.html

GIST

A former Minneapolis police officer who helped to pin George Floyd down as he gasped for air under the knee of another officer pleaded guilty to manslaughter on Monday, forgoing a trial in exchange for an agreement to drop a more serious murder charge.

J. Alexander Kueng, a rookie officer [who had joined the Minneapolis Police Department with what he said were hopes of improving it from within](#), placed his knee on Mr. Floyd for several minutes in May 2020 while Mr. Floyd protested that he could not breathe and eventually lost consciousness. The death of Mr. Floyd, who was Black, set off protests around the world over racism and police abuse and led to federal civil rights charges against the officers who were at the scene when he died.

Mr. Kueng, who also is Black, is already serving a [three-year prison sentence in the federal case](#), after a jury convicted him of failing to provide aid or to intervene as another officer, Derek Chauvin, knelt on Mr. Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes. Mr. Kueng had knelt on Mr. Floyd's torso.

As part of Mr. Kueng's plea agreement, the Minnesota attorney general's office and Mr. Kueng's lawyers agreed that they would recommend a sentence of three and a half years in federal prison, time that would be served concurrently with his state sentence.

The guilty plea came on what was scheduled to be the first day of jury selection for the murder trial of Mr. Kueng and another of the officers, Tou Thao, who kept back bystanders who were shouting that Mr. Floyd needed medical help. Mr. Thao, who is Asian American, is now the last of the four officers with unresolved criminal charges in the case.

On Monday, Mr. Thao agreed to forgo a jury trial in favor of an unusual process in which the defense and the prosecution jointly present an agreed-to set of facts to the trial judge, who will then decide Mr. Thao's guilt or innocence. There will not be any witness testimony, and the judge, Peter A. Cahill, will issue a memorandum explaining his verdict. As part of the deal between prosecutors and Mr. Thao, prosecutors will ask for a verdict only on the manslaughter charge, though they could theoretically reinstate the murder charge.

Mr. Chauvin, who is white, was [convicted of second-degree murder by a state jury](#) last year in a highly watched televised trial and later [pleaded guilty to a federal charge](#) of violating Mr. Floyd's rights. He is expected to spend [more than two decades](#) in prison.

The fourth officer, Thomas Lane, who held down Mr. Floyd's legs, was convicted in federal court of violating Mr. Floyd's rights by not providing medical care; he also [pleaded guilty](#) to a state charge of aiding and abetting second-degree manslaughter. Mr. Lane, who is white, was the only officer to suggest at the scene that the officers should roll Mr. Floyd onto his side to help him breathe. Mr. Lane is expected to serve just over two years in prison, after taking into account credit for good behavior.

All four officers were fired the day after Mr. Floyd died, as protests engulfed Minneapolis and spread to other cities, turning destructive at times.

Keith Ellison, the Minnesota attorney general whose office has led the state's prosecutions of all four officers, said he hoped Mr. Kueng's guilty plea would bring comfort to Mr. Floyd's family, who he said had "turned a personal tragedy of immense proportions into a movement for justice for all."

On May 25, 2020, the officers drove to an intersection outside a [South Minneapolis convenience store](#) after a clerk at the store called 911 to report that Mr. Floyd had used a counterfeit \$20 bill to buy cigarettes.

Mr. Floyd, 46, who had worked as a security guard before losing his job during the coronavirus pandemic, resisted the officers' attempts to get him into the back of a police car, ultimately pushing his way out of the back seat with his legs while handcuffed.

	<p>As Mr. Floyd lay handcuffed and face down on the street, Mr. Chauvin continued to hold his knee on the back of Mr. Floyd's neck for several minutes after Mr. Floyd passed out. Mr. Floyd never regained consciousness.</p> <p>Mr. Kueng's mother told The New York Times shortly after Mr. Floyd's death that her son had defended his decision to join the police force and argued with friends over whether public protests led to improvements in policing.</p> <p>"He said, 'Don't you think that that needs to be done from the inside?'" his mother, Joni Kueng, recalled him saying several years before Mr. Floyd's death, when he watched protesters block a highway.</p> <p>He had attended Monroe College in New Rochelle, N.Y., where he played soccer until needing surgery on both knees. He returned to Minneapolis and worked at a job catching shoplifters at a Macy's store, and then signed up as a police cadet in February 2019, graduating from the police academy in December of that year.</p> <p>Mr. Kueng was in a training period for the next few months after that, with Mr. Chauvin often serving as his field training officer. He became a full officer on May 22, 2020, and on his third full day on the job, he and Mr. Lane were the first officers to respond to the call from the convenience store clerk about Mr. Floyd.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 Victim confronts thieves as police no-show
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/something-needs-to-change-car-theft-victim-confronts-thieves-when-deputies-didnt-respond
GIST	<p>PUYALLUP, Wash. - A Puyallup man is calling for change after he says he had to confront suspects who stole his wife's car when law enforcement didn't respond until the day after they were called.</p> <p>Michael Wilson said someone stole his wife's car out of their driveway on Oct. 13. Later that night, they spotted the car in a parking lot at 176th St. E and Meridian Ave. E.</p> <p>"I saw two people who were in the car, who were in the process of getting high," said Wilson.</p> <p>His wife called South Sound 911, who told her officers were on the way. Wilson says he didn't know if the suspects were armed, but he wasn't taking any chances: he grabbed his gun.</p> <p>"I had the people in my car. We called them [police]. If they were there in five minutes, they probably would have found them," said Wilson</p> <p>Both suspects took off.</p> <p>"We waited for an hour to see if the cops would come. During that hour waiting, the cops never showed up. One of the people that was in my car came back. I used my Second Amendment rights again to stop them from trying to get into their vehicle, not knowing what was in their vehicle, if they were gonna try to hurt me or my family, because I had my kids with me, so not knowing if they were going to, I used my Second Amendment rights. My wife was on the phone with the police again while they were there on the phone, telling them what I was doing. The assailant also called the cops telling them I had them using my Second Amendment rights and they never showed up," said Wilson.</p> <p>After waiting three hours, his wife drove her car home, which reeked of fentanyl and meth and was filled with paraphernalia and trash. The vehicle had deep scratches in the pant and holes cut into the back seat.</p> <p>"They burnt my back seatbelt. They just burnt it. They were bored," said Wilson.</p> <p>A deputy showed up at 6:15 the following morning.</p>

"When the cops came, they didn't take any fingerprints because they said my wife had driven the car home and at that point, it was null and void for them to find anything," said Wilson.

Wilson says something needs to change. He knows it was dangerous to confront the suspects, but that car means everything to his wife.

"She feels violated. She doesn't feel like it's hers anymore," said Wilson.

Because of staffing issues, the Pierce County Sheriff's Department says there were only two deputies working the graveyard shift in that district when Wilson called for help. On their way to respond, deputies had a DUI driver in front of them they had to stop, then they were dispatched to a welfare check and then another DUI driver that led them on a short pursuit and turned out to be illegally armed.

In all, they had 12 back-to-back calls and say they don't know why South Sound 911 dispatch didn't prioritize Wilson's call.

"Officers going call to call, working too much by themselves is exactly the opposite of what we need to be doing. It's the opposite of community policing. It's the opposite of building trust and outreach and building trust in the community. It's just tired cops doing their best and getting more and more exhausted," said Steve Strachan, the executive director of the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs.

He says our state has the lowest number of officers per-capita in the nation.

"We net lost almost 500 officers in 2021. That is disastrous," said Strachan, who feels one of the biggest problems in retaining officers is that they don't feel they can get justice for victims. He points to changes to the laws in 2021 that restrict police pursuits and decriminalize felony drug possession as issues that are contributing to retention and attracting new officers.

"I think we need to tell the legislature loud and clear, even if this isn't what you meant, this is not ok," said Strachan.

He says the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs are focused on getting state aid for local governments to increase police staffing, fixing the police pursuit law so reasonable suspicion can be used to follow and arrest criminals, and on making felony drug possession illegal again.

"Letting people die in addiction on the street is not compassionate," said Strachan.

That includes pushing for money to build infrastructure for treatment.

"That's heavy lifting because it takes a lot of money, it takes a lot of staff and it's gonna take years to build that infrastructure and we have to do both of those things at the same time," Strachan said.

He's hopeful and urges people to contact their local and state legislators to push for changes to support police.

"I think the stars are beginning to align where we can start to come together and find ways to move forward to build strong public safety in this state," said Strachan.

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HEADLINE	10/24 SCSO: Everett police seize \$1.5M drugs
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/north-sound-news/15-million-drugs-seized-everett-apartment/WR6DRN4FZRD2ZJLFUN4OHONGTM/
GIST	A large quantity of drugs, valued at \$1.5 million, was seized inside an Everett apartment, according to a media release from the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office.

On the evening of Wednesday, Oct. 19, apartment staff who was processing an eviction of an abandoned apartment spotted a large quantity of drugs when they entered the apartment.

Everett police who responded to the 911 call also noted the large quantity of drugs inside the apartment and requested assistance.

Detectives with the Snohomish Regional Drug Task Force determined that the large amount of drugs was indicative of a high-level drug trafficking operation.

In all, detectives seized over 3,000 grams of heroin, 2,500 grams of pure fentanyl powder, over 100,000 M30 fentanyl pills, 989 grams of cocaine, over 21,000 grams of methamphetamine, and 101 gallons of ethanol.

A person of interest has been identified in this incident and it remains an active investigation.

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HEADLINE	10/25 Enough ammo for ‘much worse’ situation
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/10/25/us/st-louis-school-shooting-tuesday/index.html
GIST	<p>When a 19-year-old gunman opened fire at a St. Louis school Monday, killing two and injuring several others, he was armed with a long gun and nearly a dozen high-capacity magazines – enough ammunition for a “much worse” situation, police Commissioner Michael Sack said.</p> <p>Authorities credited locked doors and a quick police response – including by off-duty officers – for preventing more killings at Central Visual and Performing Arts High School.</p> <p>“This could have been much worse,” Sack said. “The individual had almost a dozen 30-round ... high capacity magazines on him. That’s a whole lot of victims there.”</p> <p>Still, he said, what happened is tragic for the victims’ families and the community.</p> <p>A 16-year-old girl was killed at the scene and a 61-year-old woman was pronounced dead at a hospital, Sack said.</p> <p>The woman was identified as Jean Kuczka, a health and physical education teacher who was looking forward to retiring in the next few years, her daughter Abigail Kuczka told CNN. Authorities have not identified the teenager.</p> <p>“Jean was passionate for making a difference and enjoyed spending time with her family,” Abigail Kuczka said in a statement.</p> <p>In her biography on the school’s website, Kuczka said had been at Central VPA High School since 2008. “I believe that every child is a unique human being and deserves a chance to learn,” she wrote in her bio.</p> <p>Seven other teenagers were injured, some of them with gunshot or graze wounds, and others with abrasions. One had a fractured ankle. They were all in stable conditions, the commissioner said.</p> <p>The gunman was identified as Orlando Harris, who graduated from the school last year. He died at a hospital after a gun battle with officers, according to the Commissioner.</p> <p>It’s unclear how the gunman gained access to the school, which authorities have said had its doors locked. The commissioner declined to provide those details, saying “I don’t want to make this easy for anybody else.”</p> <p>The gunman did not conceal his weapon when entering the school, Sack said.</p>

“When he entered, it was out ... there was no mystery about what was going to happen. He had it out and entered in an aggressive, violent manner,” the police commissioner said.

Seven security personnel were at the school at time of shooting

There were seven security personnel at the school when the gunman arrived, according to St. Louis Public Schools Communications Director George Sells.

“We had the seven personnel working in the building who did a wonderful job getting the alarm sounded quickly,” Sells said.

The police commissioner said that he did not know if the security guards at the school had guns. “Not all of the public safety security officers are armed,” he said.

He did say that the school doors were locked, which likely delayed the suspect.

“The school was closed and the doors were locked. The security staff did an outstanding job identifying the suspect’s efforts to enter, and immediately notified other staff, and ensured that we were contacted,” Sack told CNN affiliate KMOV at the scene.

The commissioner said responding officers wasted no time rushing into the school.

“There was no sidewalk conference, there was no discussion, there was no ‘Hey, where are you going to?’ they just went right in.”

The call came in for an active shooter at the high school at approximately 9:11 a.m, according to a timeline provided by Sack. Police arrived on scene and made entry just four minutes later, at 9:15 a.m. Officers found the gunman and “begin engaging him in a gunfight” at 9:23 a.m. Two minutes later, officers reported the suspect was down.

Asked about the eight minutes between officers’ arrival and making contact with the gunman, Sack said “eight minutes isn’t very long” and that officers had to maneuver through a big school with few entrances and crowds of students and staff who were evacuating.

Officers found the suspect “not just by hearing the gunfire but by talking to kids and teachers as they’re leaving,” Sack said.

Officers who were at a church down the street for a fellow officer’s funeral also responded to the shooting, in addition to officers from a nearby police station, according to the commissioner.

A SWAT team that was together for a training exercise was also able to quickly load up and get to the school to perform a secondary sweep of the building, Sack added.

Some officers were “off duty; some were in T-shirts, but they had their vests on ... the ballistic vests. So they did an outstanding job,” he said.

As phone calls came in from people hiding in different locations, officers fanned out and searched for students and staff to escort them out of the building.

Student describes jumping out of window with classmates

Adrienne Bolden, a freshman at Central VPA High School, told CNN affiliate [KSDK](#) that the children thought it was a drill until they heard the sirens and saw that their teachers were scared.

“The teacher, she crawled over and she was asking for help to move the lockers to the door so they can’t get in,” Bolden said. “And we started hearing glass breaking from the outside and gunshots outside the door.”

	<p>The student told the station that the class stayed put until they saw their assistant principal come up to one of the classroom's locked windows.</p> <p>"We opened it, the teacher said to come on and we all had to jump out the window," Bolden recalled.</p> <p>Math teacher David Williams told CNN in a call that everyone went into "drill mode," turning off lights, locking doors and huddling in corners so they couldn't be seen.</p> <p>He said he heard someone trying to open the door and a man yell, "You are all going to f**king die."</p> <p>Shortly thereafter, a bullet came through one of the windows in his classroom, Williams said.</p> <p>Williams' classroom is located on the third floor, where Sack said police engaged the shooter.</p> <p>Eventually, an officer announced herself from outside and the class ran out the nearby emergency doors.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 Delaware man in Capitol riot sentenced 2yrs
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/man-stormed-capitol-father-sentenced-2-years-rcna53827
GIST	<p>A Delaware man who, along with his father, was among the first people in the U.S. Capitol when a pro-Trump mob attacked it last year was sentenced to two years in prison Monday, prosecutors said.</p> <p>Hunter Seefried, 24, in June was convicted by a Washington, D.C., judge on a felony count of obstruction of an official proceeding and other misdemeanor counts.</p> <p>His father, Kevin Seefried, 53, who carried a Confederate flag during the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol, was convicted at the same trial, which was decided by a judge rather than a jury.</p> <p>Hunter Seefried told U.S. District Judge Trevor McFadden he was "deeply sorry for my actions" and "very ashamed of how I carried myself that day."</p> <p>He said that every day he carries the "shame and realization" that he participated in an event that's a "stain" not only on his character, but on U.S. history.</p> <p>Hunter Seefried cleared a piece of glass from a window as a mob of supporters of then-President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol as Congress was formally counting the electoral votes affirming that Trump had lost the presidential election, officials said.</p> <p>The Seefrieds, of Laurel, Delaware, "were among the first people to enter the Capitol on January 6," the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia said in a statement.</p> <p>When asked Monday by McFadden how he came to participate in the events of Jan. 6, Hunter Seefried responded: "The crowd, the energy. It's just very overwhelming."</p> <p>Hunter Seefried and his lawyer, Edson Bostic, also partially blamed the elder Seefried for encouraging his son's behavior, although Hunter Seefried, who was 21 on Jan. 6, admitted he was old enough to know better.</p> <p>"The common charge of a parent is to help prevent a young child from acting impulsively," Bostic told McFadden earlier in the hearing, implying that Kevin Seefried had failed at that parental duty by pressuring his son to storm the Capitol.</p> <p>Kevin Seefried was photographed carrying a large Confederate flag through the halls of the Capitol, instantly becoming the subject of an iconic image from the riot.</p>

	<p>McFadden called Jan. 6 a “national embarrassment” that Hunter Seefried participated in. “I believe you are a good man who messed up badly,” McFadden said.</p> <p>Prosecutors had asked that Hunter Seefried be sentenced to 64 months, or over 5 years, in prison, according to a sentencing memorandum filed by the government ahead of Monday’s hearing.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/24 Guilty plea Michigan high school shooting
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/teen-expected-plead-guilty-michigan-high-school-shooting/story?id=91880730
GIST	<p>Ethan Crumbley, the teenager accused of gunning down four students and injuring several others at his Michigan high school, pleaded guilty to all charges against him on Monday.</p> <p>"He's evil," Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard told reporters after court Monday, adding that he's relieved the plea means "the victims don't have to go through the heartbreak of the testimony and the evidentiary presentation of all the stuff that happened that terrible, terrible day."</p> <p>Crumbley, 16, appeared in court in an orange jumpsuit, white face mask and glasses, calmly answering questions from the judge and prosecutor. Crumbley admitted to them that he asked his father to buy him a specific gun. The teen confirmed he gave his father money for the gun and confirmed the weapon wasn't kept in a locked safe.</p> <p>David Williams, chief assistant prosecutor in Oakland County, said Friday when the plea was announced that there were "no plea deals, no reductions and no agreements regarding sentencing."</p> <p>The 24 charges against Crumbley included terrorism and murder.</p> <p>"We are not aware of any other case anywhere in the country where a mass shooter has been convicted of terrorism on state charges," Oakland County Prosecutor Karen McDonald said at a news conference Monday.</p> <p>The plea "guarantees every person who was in Oxford High School on that day will have a chance, if they want to, to speak in their own words about how this has affected them," she said.</p> <p>Crumbley's attorney, Paulette Michel Loftin, said Monday that her client is remorseful and is "taking accountability for his actions." The teen is set to return to court on Feb. 9. Sentencing will follow; at the sentencing, victims will have the opportunity to read statements.</p> <p>Crumbley was 15 at the time of the Nov. 30, 2021, shooting at Oxford High School. He allegedly used his father's semi-automatic handgun to carry out the attack. Crumbley did not know the students he shot, according to his attorney.</p> <p>Days before the shooting, a teacher allegedly saw Crumbley researching ammunition in class; school officials contacted his parents but they didn't respond, according to prosecutors. His mother, Jennifer Crumbley, texted her son, writing, "lol, I'm not mad at you, you have to learn not to get caught," according to prosecutors.</p> <p>Hours before the shooting, according to prosecutors, a teacher saw a note on Ethan Crumbley's desk that was "a drawing of a semi-automatic handgun pointing at the words, 'The thoughts won't stop, help me.' In another section of the note was a drawing of a bullet with the following words above that bullet, 'Blood everywhere.'"</p> <p>Crumbley's parents were called to the school over the incident, saying they'd get their son counseling but did not take him home.</p>

	<p>The teen's parents, Jennifer and James Crumbley, were charged with four counts of involuntary manslaughter after allegedly making the gun accessible and failing to recognize warning signs about their son before the shooting. They have pleaded not guilty.</p> <p>Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer tweeted Monday that she hopes the guilty plea offers "some peace" for Oxford High School's students, teachers, staff and families.</p> <p>She said, "We must do more to keep our communities safe from gun violence. We don't have time for political games. Let's work together on background checks, secure storage, and red flag laws -- commonsense gun violence prevention measures."</p>
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